



Heartbreak.  
Unexpected.  
Redemption.

*Six*  
WEEKS

T. SPEAR

*Six*  
WEEKS

# Six WEEKS

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T. S P E A R

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Six Weeks

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*To my two oldest daughters,*

*Thank you for giving me the strength, 13 years ago, to  
make one of the hardest decisions I have made, and better  
our lives.*

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## BLURB

Six Weeks.

A new beginning.

Blair Young is taking a leap of faith to save her marriage and bring stability to her home life. When her husband refuses to get another job to do what is right for their family, Blair does the unthinkable.

She joins the Air Force.

Boot camp turns out to be exactly what she needs to realize how strong physically and emotionally she can be, and she makes connections which change her life. Including the support of her attractive instructor, who becomes more than she asked for.



Sergeant Jake Brigham is welcoming another class of recruits. Every six weeks, a new set of faces, ready to be taken under his wing, show up for basic training. This group seems exactly like the rest of them, wide-eyed, and ready to be taught how to handle the real world.

Except for her.

Jake must remember he's here to teach, to bring out the best in those under his purview—not get into a personal

relationship, let alone a romantic one. But when the unexpected happens to Blair's family, Jake gives her a shoulder to lean on and the courage to push through towards a brighter future.

As graduation day draws near, will Jake have the strength to say good-bye?

Six weeks is only supposed to be the start of her new life with her family, but those six weeks shake her world.



## PROLOGUE

FOUR MONTHS EARLIER

“I lost my job,” my husband tells me as he gets into the SUV. I let out a deep sigh, but I’m not surprised. John has an ego the size of Texas and thought nothing would happen.

“Why didn’t they let you off with a warning?” I ask, already knowing the answer. They gave him a warning a couple weeks ago. I received the letter in the mail one afternoon while he was out of state. I opened it to find out he had been in two fender benders, and this was his written warning that recapped his verbal one he already received. I never told him about the letter because I was hoping he might be honest with me. I didn’t hold my breath.

“They told me their policy has changed and warnings no longer have to be given. This is such bullshit.” He’s such a terrible liar. It’s to the point now I don’t even have to look at him to know when he’s lying to me, I can hear it in his voice. Our girls, Avery, age eight months, and Kaylee age one and a half, are happy in the back seat playing with toys, and John hasn’t even turned around to say hi to them. He isn’t exactly father of the year, as he would like everyone to believe. He shows his love and affection towards our girls around our family to make face, but at home, he would rather sit on his PlayStation or watch TV than spend time with them. Lately he’s been going to the local bar with our neighbor and not returning until after one in the morning. This has added to the already almost broken bridge our marriage has become.

“So now what’s the plan?” I ask as he stares at his phone playing some stupid racing game. I want to throw it and the PlayStation out of the damn window some days.

“I don’t know. I can’t work in the same industry because I’m blacklisted, and no one’s going to hire me now.” He says

it with zero concern or care. Does he not realize we won't make it if he doesn't get a job as soon as possible? We live paycheck to paycheck and some weeks have a negative amount in our bank account. If it weren't for food stamps and WIC, I don't know how we would eat.

"Well, every fast-food place in town is hiring, and I believe a few big box stores are too." I haven't worked since I was seven months pregnant with our first daughter. The cost of daycare is outrageous, so it made sense for me to stay home. I used to help by babysitting a couple kids in town until I became pregnant with our second and it became too much. John has never asked me to work, but he makes it clear I am a capable body who can.

"I'm not working at those places," he says with disgust rolling off his tongue.

"And why is that?"

"Because," he scoffs, "you know why, Blair"

Yeah, I know. He's "too good" to work in places like that. Even if it means money in the bank, and a roof over our heads.

Even though I know we shouldn't, we stop and grab some food. Putting it on a credit card. One of many we have now. The rest of the drive home is silent. Once we are home, John tells me he's going to the bar with the neighbor and to not wait up for him. Whatever, I have gotten used to not having someone here to help me. He's a long-haul truck driver so when he's gone, he's gone for a least a week. It's almost easier when he's not here.

I get the girls bathed and in jammies. Tucked in bed and sit with them to read a book. Once they have fallen asleep, I give my friend Sarah a call. She's the only one I can talk to about this. I don't want to burden my mom with my issues, and Sarah is my only friend.

"Girl, I don't understand why you stay with him, he's such an ass to you and thinks way too highly of himself," she says with a caring yet stern sound to her voice. I know she

means well but I'm twenty-three, and I don't have a degree or any actual work experience. I got pregnant with our first daughter when I was nineteen. So, unless I want to be a maid—the last job I had for any length of time—for the rest of my life, I'm not entirely sure what to do.

"Sarah, I know you mean well, but I don't know what to do. I'm hoping one day he will wake up. The only place I could live, if I left, is my mom's. And there's never anyone hiring in

her little town. I'm sure John wouldn't let me have the car, so I would have to rely on my mom to take me and the girls places. At this point I feel like I'm staying with him more out of convenience... which is probably horrible."

"I get it, I do, but life also hasn't always handed you the simple way out and I know, even if it's a struggle, you will make it. With or without him in your life. You and those girls deserve so much better. Someone who loves you and wants to do everything and anything to take care of you."

"Thanks girl, I know I can count on you to make me feel better. I'm going to talk to him tonight about getting a job and see what we can work out."

"Good luck," she says, and we hang up.

WEEK

*One*

# CHAPTER ONE

JAKE

**E**very now and then the Air Force lets you pick where you get to go and what you get to do next. That's not what happened here. Four and half years ago, if you would have told me I would leave Korea and I'd be headed to Texas to become a training instructor, I would have laughed in your face. I was hoping after my year tour in Korea they would give me the option to stay overseas, but I guess they needed me somewhere else.

So here I am, four years of waking up at the ass crack of dawn and starting my days off by yelling at new recruits. Being an instructor has its advantages though. I see men and women come in here scared, weak, and lost then I transform them to someone who can hold their heads up high and be proud of person they have become over their six weeks with me. I am a face they will remember their entire life, because basic training is life altering.

I am ready for a change though. When I joined, I thought working in finance was going to be the way to go. Numbers work well with my brain and I thought it would be an excellent skill to have for when I retire. Boy, was I wrong...Nobody likes the finance people. If these trainees think they get yelled at a lot, they should be on the receiving end of an airman who's pay is a day late. Maybe they should have created a bank account with a military affiliated bank, and they would get paid a day early like everyone else. Needless to say, I don't miss working in finance. But my time as a T.I. is up. This could very well be one of my last flights.

"Hey Brigham," says sergeant Brookes as he walks through the door into the dorm room I am preparing for my new flight. Sergeant Brookes is short but built like a Mack

truck. The man is terrifying, He's been in the dorm next to me for two years and we have become pretty good friends.

"Hey Brookes. You already for tomorrow?" I ask him. Tomorrow our new set of recruits comes in.

"I am not, but all I really have left to do is restock the cleaning closet." He rolls his eyes and sits on the bed I just made.

"You think your approval for cross training is going to come through soon?" he asks.

I stop making the next bed in line and stand. I hate making beds.

"I really fucking hope so," I say. I put my application in to go into a new career field two months ago. I am not sure what is taking so long, but I am thinking they forgot about me.

"An aircraft mechanic though? You really want to be stuck out on the flight line all day working on jets?"

"I have been inside the walls of these dorms and the confines of finance for far too long. I need room to breathe. I need to do something where I can get my hands dirty and honestly, being around jets all the time sounds pretty awesome."

"If you say so, man. So, you get females or males?"

"Females. Thank fuck."

"Lucky. I got males. I swear, they are whinier than females most of the time."

I laugh because it's true. The only downfall is that I don't get to welcome my flight when they arrive. The first night here there will be a female instructor because someone has to herd them in and out of the showers and that can't be me.

"I better get back to it," Brookes says as he gets up and turns, fixing the wrinkles he made on the bed.

"All right man. I'll see ya." I nod my head towards him as he exits the dorm.



I finish making the beds and check over everything again. Walking through the dorm, I feel a sense of pride. Being an instructor has become a big part of the person I am now and even though I will miss it, I am so ready to let it go and move on to the next chapter of my life. A part of me really wants to settle down, to have a Mrs. Brigham and mini me's running around. I'm twenty-five years old and I haven't let myself get into a serious relationship because this career makes being home very hard. These are twelve to fourteen-hour days and that doesn't leave enough time for much else

## CHAPTER TWO

BLAIR

**A**s the tires screech to a halt at the Air Force base gates, I remind myself why I'm here. If the choice had been easier, and John could have done this, he would have. That's what I tell myself, anyway. We needed stability, and we needed it fast. Joining the military wasn't even on my radar four months ago. Until I found myself in a recruiter's office getting promised a steady paycheck.

But my girls mean the world to me, and I had to do something drastic to make their lives better. My husband isn't stepping up to the plate. I have struggled through far harder situations than this and came out stronger on the other side. The girl next to me seems terrified, as do most of the young people on this bus. Most of them fresh out of high school and probably as lost and confused as I am. As we pass through the gates and drive a few more blocks, I notice the streets are lined with static displays of jets from past and present. Flags lined and lit behind them give a sense of calming as they wave in the breeze of the night sky. Then building after building and field after field. This is my home for the next six weeks.

Our bus stops in front of an old tan building. It's two stories. The doors are metal, the windows bared, and it looks like a prison. Across from the building is a field with a running track. I'm assuming that's where we will work out.

We file off the bus, and I can already hear them yelling. The heat hitting me is like nothing I have ever felt before. Being from a northern state, we don't get the heat they do here in Texas.

I got my flight number the day before I left home, so I would know where to get off the bus. Men and women in wide brim hats stand at the front of a concrete slab yelling at the new trainees to stand still, look forward and don't

talk. They posted the flight numbers on the walls behind the training instructors. The recruiter told me the wonderful people yelling at us, are referred to as T.I.'s.

I find my flight, set my stuff next to me, stand up straight, stare forward and seal my lips. I don't want to draw attention. I want to get through my six weeks unnoticed, so I can start a new life with my husband and children. I have only been away from them for twenty-four hours and while I feel like I left a part of me at home, I also feel more confident in myself knowing I've taken this step for my family.

I left home right after my second daughter's first birthday. It was the hardest day of my life. I never became one hundred percent comfortable leaving my girls with their dad. Our friends' daughter, who's seventeen, came to stay and help, as well. But no one shows love and caring like a mother. My mom lives thirty minutes away and will visit on the weekends to pick the girls up to do something fun. She will be my watchful eye while I'm away and let me know how things are actually going.

"Ladies, where you are standing now is 'The Pad'." You will notice there are dots on the ground. This is to make it easier for your brains to comprehend where you need to stand." I look down and notice the twelve-inch white dots lined up in rows of four across. Not one of us is standing on one. "All right assholes, grab your shit and let's get inside" the short, but burly woman at the front of our flight yells. We march up the steps and walk into our new home for the next six weeks. It's a huge space with two bays to my left lined with beds and lockers on either side. There's what looks like an office at the back between them. To my left is an enormous empty closet, the bathroom and showers, and a vast room with one single table at the front.

It's so loud inside I'm not even sure what they are saying. Five more T.I.'s are stomping around yelling at everyone. Once we are all in and find our beds, it grows

quiet. The short woman walks up and down the bays looking over us as if we are filthy, disgusting humans. With a hard loud commanding voice she says, "Grab the belt off your bed, put it on and get your canteen out. You have one minutes to fill your canteen with water and meet in the common room. That's the big empty room, in case you can't put two and two together" One minute, I question in my mind, is she serious? There's thirty women in this dorm and five sinks! "*Move your asses!*" she screams as we finally let our bodies move into the direction of the bathroom.

"Hurry ladies, I don't have all night, I have a life too ya know!" I can hear from outside the bathroom. Water is everywhere, but we do as we are told and make it into the common room in under a minute.

"I'm impressed," says the short woman looking over all of us. "Just kidding," she snorts out a laugh and I can already feel my hatred for her growing. "One of the most important things you are going to do over the next six weeks is to stay hydrated, and that starts tonight. All of you will chug their canteen of water and hold it upside down over your head so I can see you're done. Once you start drinking, you're not to stop or you will fill your canteen up again and start over." Well shit, someone's going to vomit, and I hope it's not me because I don't need to start my time here off as someone they recognize. We all chug the water from our canteens and sure enough two girls vomit. I don't look their way and breathe only from my mouth because I know, with the way my stomach feels right now, the smell alone will make me puke.

The short woman walks up to one of the girls, looks over to the other and says, "Well, I believe we just weeded out the weakest of the bunch," she says as she pats the girl on the shoulder. "You two girls go to the closet in the hall and clean up your mess, fill your canteens... and try again. The rest of you get back to your beds and unload your luggage."

I shuffle out of the common room and finally get a good look at the dorms. There are two bays with two rows of single and bunk beds. I was lucky and snagged a single. Each bed is covered with a fitted sheet, a flat sheet, a wool blanket, and a pillow. I swing my bag onto my bed and start unpacking. Some of these girls brought two or three pieces of luggage. Did their recruiter not explain to them, the only thing of theirs they will get to wear is bras and underwear? My belongings compromise of, one change of clothes, seven pairs of underwear, a few sports bras, a hairbrush, hair ties, and travel size bathroom supplies.

"All right ladies, we are going to make this as painless as possible. We all have the same bits, so don't act like this shit is new to you. Grab your soaps and form a line. When you get to me, tell me your size and I will give you a PT outfit and a towel. You each have two minutes to shower and return to your beds."

I shower as quickly as possible, regretting not getting my hair cut. My thick almond brown hair is only a few inches from touching my lower back and it's the longest it's ever been. I knew I would have to keep it in a tight bun all the time, but it wasn't a good enough reason to cut it before I left. But now, only getting a tiny amount of time to shower, I'm kicking myself.

We all shower and dress as quickly as possible with these T.I.'s screaming in our ears every step of the way. The PT clothes are a gray shirt with a reflective logo on the back and blue windbreaker shorts, the kind you can hear from a mile away.

Back by our beds I can see the two girls who puked are there and looking pale as can be. They won't last. The short woman walks up and down the bays examining everyone's belongings. Throwing things she believes to be pointless on the floor.

"The only thing you're allowed to keep with you are your undergarments, bathroom supplies, money, any form of

identification you have, or paperwork. Put everything else, including cell phones and jewelry, back in your packs and stack them in the small room at the back of the hall. We will lock everything up until you have graduated."

None of this phases me, I did my research and knew not to bring anything more than what I needed, and I'm too poor for a cell phone anyway. I have fifty dollars and my ID card; I don't even have in a wallet, just a plastic baggie to keep them safe.

When we're done storing our luggage and putting our belongings in our wall lockers, it's already eleven at night and I am exhausted. I can see the tired in the eyes of all the females here, and the look in their eyes screams for them to let us sleep. "Well ladies," the short woman says with the other T.I.'s standing behind her, "it was fun, but I am damn sure glad you are not my flight. I couldn't put up with a bunch of whiny females for six weeks. Get in your beds, close your eyes, don't talk, and just wait for the real fun to begin tomorrow."

I have never been more thankful to climb onto a four-inch-thick mattress in my life. The sheets are far from soft and the wool blanket is heavy and itchy through the sheet. It is the most uncomfortable bed I have ever been in, but with how tired I am, I don't even care. The lights cut out and the T.I.'s leave. I can hear the whimpers of some girls. They are crying and probably regretting their decision. Maybe the first night is the worst of it. I may not even call it bad. Funny, but not bad. Like, how do I sign up and get paid to yell at people. I have already been through enough shit in my life, getting yelled at is the least of my worries. My daughters come to mind, their smiles, their laughs, the way they hug me, and I drift to sleep.

## CHAPTER THREE



BLAIR

I wake up to music blaring from the speaker at the front of the dorm. What in the actual fuck is that sound? Is this what I have to wake up to every morning?

"Reveille" is playing and its five a.m. *Fuck my life*. I may have two kids, but I'm not a morning person.

The next thing I hear is a booming male voice. "Get up ladies! I don't have all morning and I'm hungry! Grab your shit and change in the bathrooms."

All the girls are on their feet, grabbing the one outfit they let us keep last night and heading to the bathroom. I look around as I grab my stuff, eyes still droopy with sleep, and can't see who's yelling.

"You have fifteen minutes to piss, get dressed, and get down on the pad lined up."

Rubbing my sleepy eyes, I grab my thing and head toward the bathroom, making a left turn and slamming into something hard. I look up and my heart races. I turned the wrong way and ran right into the towering man that is yelling at us. The first thing I notice are his bright green eyes that have such anger in them, his lips pressed together in a straight line, his sharp jaw, and his dirty blond hair. As I look down toward my feet, I notice a hint of a tattoo peeking from his collar.

"Wrong way, Princess," he says as I back away slowly and look back up at him. Shoot, he's gorgeous.

He has the most pleased and deviant smile on his face. I walk as quickly as possible to the bathroom because I know I have limited time and a lot of hair to deal with. I get my hair brushed and braided into a bun, then put my things away. Half the dorm is empty and the T.I. is nowhere in sight. Thank goodness for that. Maybe he's our wake-up

call. It shouldn't be okay to let someone so good-looking deal with a dorm full of females...right?

Wrong.

Walking down the steps to the pad I see him, walking back and forth in front of his flight—my flight. His strong build is clear even through his uniform. His hands are on his hips and his ABU top, which is short for Airman Battle Uniform, is tucked up around his hands, revealing an exceptionally fine ass.

I'm a married woman, but who says I can't enjoy the view for the next six weeks. I get in line as the rest of the flight falls in.

"All right ladies, here is how this morning is going to work. You are going to file into the chow hall, grab your tray, pick your food. When you get to your table, you wait for each chair to have a person, then you sit. Eat fast because when the table in front of you finishes, you have thirty seconds to finish up and leave. Everyone meets back at the pad."

Eyes straight and we move forward. I'm fourth in line and out of the corner of my eyes I can see him standing by the door. Arms folded over his broad chest, his wide brim hat pulled down, almost covering his beautiful eyes and a smirk across his face that could send any girl to her knees. I try my best not to look as I march by, but I'm drawn to his eyes like a flame.

Next, I'm fumbling back. I notice his arm is reached out in front of me and that's what my shoulders slammed into. Jeez, he's fast. I gather my bearing and look straight ahead, not giving him the pleasure of knowing he rattled me. He leans down, and I can feel the brim of his hat barely touching my hair and his fiery breath at my ear. "If you watch where you're going nothing will catch you by surprise, Princess."

"Okay, sorry," I say, more sheepishly than I intend to.

He let out a breath and I can hear the annoyance as he corrects me. "That's 'Yes, sir' to you, Princess, don't forget it." I can see his smile out of the corner of my eye as he pulls away and the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. His voice is deep and sexy.

"Yes, sir," I say while keeping my focus straight ahead. He moves his arm and I continue inside. So much for flying under the radar.

Breakfast was a whirlwind of different people in my face yelling, and I'm not even sure I understood what they were saying. At least the one minute I had to eat my breakfast I could do it without someone telling me I was doing it wrong.

Back outside we are all lined up at attention as our T.I. comes strolling out of the chow hall laughing with his buddy without a care in the world. But once he turns toward us, he goes stone faced. His hands are behind his back as he casually makes his way to the front of our flight.

"Good Morning ladies. I presume you all had plenty of time to eat and are ready to start the day."

He smiles because he knows we did not. But he can make jokes all day if that smile stays on his face.

"My name is Sergeant Brigham, and I will be your T.I. for the next six weeks, but to you I am 'sir'. You will always end your sentence with sir." As he's rattling on about what we have to do today, I can't help but watch his every move. He isn't tense and you can tell he is comfortable in his position of power. He walks from one side of the flight to the other, explaining something and examining us.

"Yes, sir!" the flight shouts. Everyone except me. Crap, what did he say? I can feel his eyes on me as he walks back to the front of the formation. He knows I didn't answer with everyone else. His burning stare gives me shivers. He keeps looking as he says, "Since some of you didn't hear me the first time, let me repeat myself. Did you all hear and

understand what the day holds and what I expect from you?"

"Yes, sir!" I yell with everyone else, knowing I have no clue what he's talking about...oops! He breaks eye contact and makes his way towards the side of the flight, the side I'm on. Hopefully, it's to turn around and walk back like he has been doing. He walks past me, but then I can feel the heat radiating off his body and his breath on the back of my ear. My body stiffens and my breath hitches. I can barely see him, but I can feel him. He has a presence that makes anyone take notice. "Was that...a lie, Princess?" Princess? Is this going to be a thing now? Fabulous.

"You should know, I don't take to kindly to liars." He comes around to my front and his eyes lock on mine. Dear lord they are gorgeous. "Are we going to have a problem, Princess?"

"No."

Crap!

"Excuse me? Want to try again?"

"No, sir," I say with as much confidence as I can muster.

"From now on, if one of you fucks up, you all fuck up," he says as he makes his way back to the front of the formation.

The rest of the day goes by smoothly. We got our uniforms, set up a bank account with banks that work specifically with the military, and got stationary to write letters home, which I'm super excited about. After dinner, we head back to our dorm and gather in the common room. Sergeant Brigham is sitting at a table at the front.

"Ladies, I presume everyone had an amazing first day. Now we are going to go over what to expect in the coming weeks." He tells us about how the mail works, when we can expect to make our first phone call home, classes we will take, physical training we will do, and something called "warrior week". He gives us one hour to do as we please if we are quiet. I use the time to write to my girls. I miss them so badly it hurts, and not knowing what's going on at home

is killing me. Once it's lights out and my head hits the pillow,  
I'm asleep in no time.

## CHAPTER FOUR

JAKE

**F**emale flights are my favorite, not because they are females but because they care. Boys don't give a shit and while that can be nice sometimes, it means they don't pay attention to their surroundings, and rarely do things right the first time and their listening skills are pretty pathetic. It takes them longer in all aspects. Also, I don't have to be as high strung with female flights. I can leave most days without having to yell an excessive amount and my head isn't throbbing.

But yesterday... yesterday was something else. I rarely give these girls a second look or care because one, it's against code of conduct, and two, they are all straight out of high school and barely legal. Then there was her. I haven't had someone capture my attention in a long time like that blue-eyed brunette did. When she slammed into me and looked up, I almost lost my composure. Which can't happen.

She's older than the other girls in the flight, at least by a few years. Which means she's starting later than most, and I'm curious why. I pull my cherry red Mustang into the parking lot behind the dorms and take a few minutes to breathe. I enjoy getting here early. I enjoy having a few moments alone to gather my thoughts for the day.

Today she will be in uniform, and I will figure out her name. Then I can at least get general information on her. I put my hands to my face. "I sound like a stalker," I mumble to myself before exiting the car.

I click open the dorm door open as "Reveille" plays, and so starts the day.

"All right ladies let's go! Hustle. Don't make me wait on you!" I yell, then turn around and walk out. I don't need a

repeat of yesterday. So, I leave and wait for the flight down on the pad so we can head in for breakfast.

The ladies fall in quicker than I thought they would. Hopefully, this flight won't be as dysfunctional as my last one. As I pace back and forth waiting for our turn to enter the chow hall, I tell them what the plan is for the day. Once it's time, I make my way to my spot by the door to watch them all file in. I can see her trying hard to not look my way. I don't think she knows I've caught her looking. I need to lock eyes with her again. I step in line right in front of her and this time she stops inches from me. She was ready. I'm at least a foot taller than her, so I bend down, not quite touching the brim of my hat to her forehead and look into her ocean blue eyes. I feel like I could get lost in those eyes for hours. I only let my brain wander for a few seconds before I remember why I stopped her, and I look down quick to see what her name tape says. Young.

"Trainee Young, see what happens when you're paying attention? You won't be taken by surprise so easily." Her eyes stay focused on mine I can see something in them I don't see in most of the trainees that come through here. It's a different sadness and drive. Like she's here physically, but not mentally. She has a story to tell, and I want to hear it. I look over her face one more time, taking in her cute, curved nose and full lips and how her cheeks are blushing red from our proximity.

"Have a fabulous breakfast, Princess," I say and step out of her way.

Later in the evening, while the flight has their hour of free time, I go into the conjoining office. I lock myself inside. Thankfully, there are no windows, so there's no chance anyone will see what I am doing on the computer. I pull up my flight roster and find Young.

Blair Young, twenty-three, married, with two kids. Married? Most ladies coming through aren't married, let alone have kids. There's definitely a reason besides the



normal “I don’t want to attend college” or “I want to serve my country” reason she is here. I turn off the computer, head out of the office, and say good night to my flight. As I’m walking out, I chance a glance in Blair’s direction. She’s sitting on her bed writing. I imagine she’s writing a letter to her kids and husband. She has a slight smile on her face and seeing it gives me hope this process won’t break her.

I need to interact with her, to talk to her one on one. I can’t keep going each morning with her eyes on me and not know what is behind them. I don’t know how many times I wanted to reach out and stop her today. But I must keep my composure and show no sign this girl has my brain fuzzy. But every chance I get to watch her, I do. And I let my imagination run wild. I imagine what it would be like to kiss her soft lips and make her forget whatever makes her look sad. Whatever's making her heart hurt.

## CHAPTER FIVE

BLAIR

**M**arching hasn't been such a bad thing. It's steady and there's no question about how fast or slow to go. You just keep pace. But today Sgt. Brigham decided it was time we learned how to jog in formation. Considering how close we all are to each other, I see this going badly. As soon as he sings his cadence, we jog. Immediately one girl trips on the back of someone else's heel and goes down. The entire flight stops, and Sergeant Brigham comes over.

"Get up trainee, it's jogging, not rocket science. One foot in front of the other. I know you know how to walk," he says with anger and annoyance in his voice. He isn't in the mood today and I can tell.

She doesn't get up; she sits there staring at the ground. In my mind, I was screaming at her to get up. Get up you idiot or we all pay the price and jogging is bad enough in this heat. It's the middle of July in San Antonio, TX. It's hot as balls outside.

"I don't want to," she says and harrumphs her arms across her chest. There's a quiet gasp in the flight. What the hell is this girl's problem.

*"Excuse me?"* he yells down at her.

He bends down so he's right next to her facing the side of her head. "Did you refuse a direct order?"

He's only a couple people away from me, but I swear I can feel the heat of anger radiating off his body.

"Yes, I did. I'm done, I don't want to do this anymore, I want to go home!" she sounds like my one-year-old when I tell her she can't eat ice cream for dinner.

Sergeant Brigham laughs, and it isn't a chuckle, it's a full-on belly laugh. Once he catches his breath, he stands and says, "Well, we are about a mile from the dorms, I'm

sure you can find your way. Fall out of my flight and figure it out." He points his hand towards the way we came.

I don't know why, but a smile radiates across my face. I tried hiding it by looking down, but at that moment he looks at me and caught the glint of humor I found in the whole situation. Holding back my laugh was all I could do.

Once she falls out, Sergeant Brigham goes back to the front of the flight and paces back and forth. His hand to his chin in thought.

"Well, well, well, it seems one of your own can't hold her own with the rest of you. But that doesn't forgive her defiance and like I told you before, when one of you fucks up, you all fuck up." He's annoyed and getting angry. His hands clenched at his sides and I can see the veins in them popping.

God, I love when this man gets angry. It awakens something in me, and I want to touch him, kiss him... ride him. Oh, my god what am I thinking. I'm a married woman. Even if my husband is a total dick ninety percent of the time, and I could probably do better. Ugh, I know I could do better, but there is nothing I can do right now. I'm stuck. Stuck and hoping things will change and we can be better for each other. I know there's a reason we got together in the first place, maybe we need to find that again.

"So, let's see, I guess we will only do fifty push-ups for her disobedience. On your faces, ladies!"

*I'll get on your face*, I think, and let out a small but not so quiet giggle. Shit, did I say that out loud, did I laugh out loud too? Oh, no no no no no!

"Trainee Young, stay on your feet."

Well crap, now what? He comes towards me as the rest of the flight dropped to the ground and started counting. He puts his face as close to the side of my head as possible without touching me, but I can feel his furious breath on my ear.

"And what about what I said was so funny to you?" he says in a low steady tone.

"Nothing, sir, I am sorry, it won't happen again, sir."

"Not good enough." He lifted his hat and inched closer. I can feel the tip of his nose on the corner of my ear. The heat between my legs is radiating through my entire body.

"Do tell me how what I said hit your funny bone," he says, breathing out and sending chills down my neck.

I bring my voice down to more of a whispered tone, so the surrounding flight won't hear me.

"My mind went somewhere it shouldn't have and after your show of anger towards her... it made me a little giddy," I say and give my shoulder a little shrug.

I turn my head, our lips almost touch. His eyes still waiting for my real answer.

"Sir," I say in a quieter voice. Sounding as innocent as ever, "But I'll get on your face." I smile and pull my bottom lip in and bite down. My cheeks instantly become hot.

What just came out of my mouth? Who is this girl? Am I really flirting with my T.I.? He does things to me, things I can't explain. He inhales and lets out a low growl I feel deep in my core. He licks his lower lip.

"Tempting, Princess," he says and pulls his face away from mine.

He turns and walks back to the front of the flight. Who are now on push-up number forty-three? I stand there hotter and more bothered than I have been in years. My husband hasn't made me feel the things this man does, and this man hasn't even touched me.

Once everyone's done, Sergeant Brigham starts his cadence again, and we jog back to the dorm.

Later that evening, once Sergeant Brigham has left and leaves us to our own devices, I attempt to write in my new journal, but my bunk mate quickly interrupts me.

"Hey Blair, what happened today? Why did you laugh? You could have gotten us all in more shit."

"I know, I'm sorry Sam, I wasn't thinking, and I let my mind wander." Sam is probably nineteen and as cute as a button. She's five foot three, has short red hair, bright green eyes, and the biggest smile I have ever seen. She's here because it's what her family does. She comes from a long line of military veterans, and she figured it was the easiest way to get to where she wants to be. She wants to be a psychologist, but the schooling is expensive. While she is in the military, she will work and attend school for free.

"He is hot though, right?" she says with a grin on her face and her eyebrows waggling. "In like an older man, daddy kind of way."

"Oh my god, Sam, seriously," I say and smack her arm playfully.

"I'm just saying," she says and winks at me.

I smile and shake my head. I can't and won't let her or anyone know the way he makes me feel.

And where did that courage come from, anyway? I am a mouse. I've become the quiet girl after being married. I may think things like that, but I don't say them out loud. Nor do I ever act on them. Being in this situation, I feel like it's kind of bringing a bit of the rebel out in me. I should embrace it. I can come out of this a stronger, better, and a more courageous woman. Maybe. Or maybe I'll stay in my bubble where it's comfortable.



THE FIRST WEEK has flown by. We stay busy constantly besides our one hour in the evening, which I spend writing to my girls or in my journal. Sergeant Brigham and I have shared our fair share of sultry looks towards each other, and no one seems to notice. It's Sunday evening and we are all gathered in the common room for some announcements and mail call.

"This week we start P.T.—physical training. Every morning except the weekends. We will go before breakfast so be sure to drink water before bed and wear your P.T. gear in the morning. Saturday you will all get to make a phone call. You can buy calling cards later this week when we go to the B.X. and you will each get ten minutes to talk."

I can't wait to make a phone call and hear my girls' voices and find out how it's been going without me there.

"All right, ladies. Mail call!" He grabs a big white box from the side of the table and sets it in front of him.

As he reads off everyone's name, I have a feeling my name won't be one he calls. Why would my husband take the time out of his day to write to me or have our girls color me a picture? It's not like I'm fourteen hundred miles away from home and want to know he cares about me. And know he's taking time with the girls to do anything fun.

Sure enough, Sergeant Brigham gets to the last two letters, and they aren't for me. My stomach sinks as I watch all the girls around me open their mail. The smiles on their faces and the laughter filling the room rips a hole in my heart. I can feel the tears pricking at the back of my eyes. I don't think anyone notices when I stand up and exit the room. I am happy for them, but my heart hurts, and I need to be alone for a few minutes.

As soon as I shut the bathroom door behind me, the tears fall. Maybe this is all a bad idea. It has only been a week; I can still drop out. Then what? What would I be going home to? To a man who always puts himself first, but also to my daughters. I miss my daughters so much it hurts. But I still have no college education, no actual work experience, and no way of taking care of my family. So, leaving isn't an option.

A knock on the bathroom door startles me. I didn't think anyone noticed me slip out. "Is everything okay in there?" Sergeant Brigham's voice asks from the other side of the stall door. Crap, I don't want him to see me crying. I stand

and wipe my wet face on the back of my sleeve and open the door. I can feel my face heat as soon as I lock eyes with him. I look away quickly, hoping he didn't notice the affect he has on me with just a look.

"I'm fine." I step out and say with a stern but broken voice.

"Fine? Fucked Up, Insecure, Neurotic, and Emotional? You don't look like you are fine. Sad, but not fine," he says as he puts his hand on my shoulder and ducks his head down to find my eyes, putting a knuckle under my chin to lift it from my chest and look at him. I swallowed the lump in my throat and hide my tears the best I can.

"I'm sorry. I thought my husband cared a little more, that's all. I have two little girls at home and hearing from them would have meant a lot to me."

Ugh, I hate being vulnerable, especially around a man I don't even know. His grip on my shoulder tightens, his eyebrows crimp together and his jaw tightens. A look of concern but annoyance. Annoyed by what? By me being another emotional girl he has to tend to? He pulls me in and I'm not sure what to do. I put my arms in front of my chest, resting my chin on my fists. He puts his arms around me and gently rests his hand on the back of my head, and just like that all my emotions come to the forefront. I cry into his chest as he holds me, his arms strong around me, letting me know it's okay. I stay there for a few minutes, catching my breath and letting what is happening register, noting how amazing he smells. Like sandalwood and ocean salt. I can feel the heat radiating from his chest to my cheek. I look up at him and his hands move to the back of my shoulders.

"Are you allowed to hug me?" I ask. I mean, it's just a hug, right? People hug each other all the time, but this is a unique setting. This is one man with an entire flight of females. I'm sure they have rules about such engagement.



He takes a deep breath and leans down so I can feel his rough cheek on mine.

"I would break all the rules for you, Princess." His lips graze my cheek, and the heat of his breath makes me shiver. He looks at me again for a few seconds, then slowly releases his hold on me and walks out.



SLEEP TONIGHT IS POINTLESS. All I can think about is his hands on me, his mouth so close to mine. The throbbing between my legs won't stop. The clock on the wall says two-forty-five a.m., and it's silent in the dorm as I slip out of bed. My first thought is to take a cold shower, but because our showers are communal, turning the water on might wake people up. But something has to give.

I walk around for a few minutes, trying to will my aching to stop when I notice a light from the back of the dorm. It's Sergeant Brigham's office, but I'm positive he left. I knock lightly on the door, but there's no answer. Gently so as not to wake anyone, I turn the knob and open the door. I slowly peek my head around to see he indeed is not here. I let out a sigh of relief...or is it disappointment?

I walk into his office, shut, and lock the door behind me. It smells like him, like sandalwood and ocean salt. I breathe it in as I flip the light off and run my hand along his desk leading me to his chair, only the light from his computer screen illuminating the space. I sit and let my mind wander. Touching my stomach and running my hands over my hard nipples, tugging ever so slightly. I keep one hand there while the other feels its way down to the elastic of my shorts. Slowly, I dip my hand underneath and find the apex of what is keeping me awake. Imagining it's him, concentrating on the smell in his office and how his voice sounds hot on my ear.

I slowly rub my clit while still squeezing and pinching my nipple with my other hand. If only it were him, he could be the one to take the ache away. To make me feel like I deserve again. The thoughts of his hands on me make me move faster. I slide two fingers inside and I fuck myself until I find my release.

WEEK  
*two*

## CHAPTER SIX

JAKE

I file the ladies into the chow hall and sit at the head tables, which are so marvelously called "The Snake Pit". The T.I.'s watch each trainee as they leave the food line, round the corner in front of us, and head to their seats. Sometimes we will stop them, get in their face to remind them that nowhere is safe, and we are the bosses. I look up from my meal as Young is almost finished getting her food.

"That one," one of the other T.I.'s says. "The brunette that's almost done. She looks scared out of her mind."

He's talking about Young, and I want to tell him to leave her be, but I can't.

"Hey, trainee!" he yells, and Young stops in her tracks looking next to and behind her. "Yeah, you dumbass, come here and put your tray down."

"Yes, sir." She sets her tray down and takes a step back. The entire time staring straight ahead. She stands at attention as the T.I. rounds the table and steps to her side, bending slightly so he's talking directly at her face.

"What's wrong trainee?" he says with a raised voice. He looks down at her chest to her name tape and I feel heated.

"Young, are you scared? You look scared"

"No, sir!" She says it without a lick of emotion.

"*Well, you should be!*" he yells in her ear, and she flinches. I shoot up out of my chair, feeling the overwhelming need to protect her. But sit down quickly because it's not my place.

"Yes, sir, I will stay scared from now on," she says. I can see her guard is up now and she's stone faced. She's not letting him get to her. Being strong is the only way to be in basic, and she's doing a good job.

"Don't be a smartass, Young." He is in her face and my blood is boiling. "Get your fucking tray and go eat, and next

time don't fucking lie to me!"

She grabs her tray quickly and glances in my direction and smiles. *What?* She fucking smiled at me after getting her ass ripped by another T.I. There is something wild in her eyes and I want to explore it. She turns and takes her seat at the next available spot to eat.

After chow, the girls head back to the dorms to get uniforms on. We have to have a meeting this morning in the common room to assign dorm jobs. I may rig the process and give Young the easiest job. Well, maybe not the easiest, but the one that might get me alone with her more often.

We all meet in the common room and their chit chat is deafening. Only downfall about female flights. They are like clucking hens when left alone.

"Shut it," I say with a raised voice, catching their undivided attention.

"Ladies, I'm sure your all overly excited to start your second week of training, but this dorm is a fucking filth hole. Today, you will each get assigned a job to help keep the dorm in tip-top shape."

I only hear a couple groans from them.

"I have everyone's name in my hat and will pick who gets what job."

I swish my hand inside my hat, mixing the names around.

"All right, first up we have the floor crew. Someone will sweep, someone will mop, and someone will polish. Trainee's Smith, Carter, and Ramos, you will be the floor crew. Next, we have bathrooms. Two people on toilets, two people on sinks, and two on the showers."

I shuffle my hat around to make sure I get all the names mixed up nicely as they all watch. Bathroom is the worst job from what I have heard from prior troops.

"Taylor and Reese on toilets, Preston and Jones on sinks, and Davis and Garcia will do the showers."

The sigh of relief from the other trainees makes me smile. I usually let the mean facade slip away a bit in the

second week, but only when we are in this room. This is a safe zone.

"Next we have dorm mom. The dorm mom will make sure everyone is doing their job, doing it correctly, and if something is wrong, she is the one I will address. She is the one who will pay for your mistakes."

I shuffle the hat around again and peek inside to make sure the little piece I slipped under the inside rim is still there and grab it.

"Trainee Young, you will be dorm mom." She rolls her eyes and I chuckle. "What's wrong, Young?"

"I think it's funny. I'm the only real mom in this flight, and that's the spot I get picked for."

"Sir." Oh, she almost didn't catch herself there.

"Yes, well then you already have experience and I expect you to do a good job."

"Yes, sir," she says, rolling her eyes again. I should punish her for that.

I finish calling off the rest of the jobs and get the trainees assigned. I show everyone the cleaning closet and tell them to get to work.

"Young, come with me. You need your clipboard."

"Yes, sir," she says as she follows me to my office. She stands at the door as I grab her clipboard, noticing she's biting her lip and it makes my dick twitch. She does that a lot. Maybe it's a nervous thing.

I hand her the clipboard and she grabs it, but I don't let go right away. I lean closer to her to be sure none of the other trainee's hear, "I expect you to take your job seriously, I would hate to punish you in my office." My dick stirs to life at the thought.

She lets out a heated breath and says, "Sir, I might screw up just so you can punish me," and she yanks the clipboard from my hand, and turns out of the office, shutting the door behind her.

I chuckle a little and sit back in my chair, my dick hard and needing relief. I rarely do this at work, but damn she makes me horny looking at her. I unbutton my pants, let my erection spring out, and start pumping. Rubbing my thumb over the head of my cock and spreading the pre-cum up and down my shaft. Thinking about how much more enjoyable it would be if it were her hands on me, squeezing the base of my dick and pumping her hand fast. Better yet, if it were her bouncing up and down on my dick making my world explode. It doesn't take long before I'm spilling into a tissue. I put myself away, clean my hands with some handy-wipes and get to work on my computer while the dorm gets spit shined.



LYING IN BED, I can't wrap my head around what this woman is doing to me. She's beautiful and mysterious, and the sass in her eyes pulls me in. I can tell there's something in her wanting to get out. I'm struggling because I could lose everything. My job is to get her ready for life as a productive member of the military, not daydream of her naked in my bed, my arms wrapped around her as she puts her burdens on me. *Let me carry them for you while you figure this out, Blair.* I squeeze my pillow to my chest. *Let me break the rules for you, Blair. Let me hold you when you cry, let me help you forget your worry. Let me help you see the courageous, independent woman I see in you.*



## CHAPTER SEVEN

BLAIR

**T**uesday morning and I am ready for the hell P.T. is going to bring. We all shuffle down the stairs and get on our spots on the pad waiting for Sergeant Brigham. He comes out of the chow hall with a croissant in his hand and laughs with the other T.I.'s. We don't get to eat until after our workout. He's such an ass. I'm starving.

P.T. starts with stretches. Rows and rows of trainees all face the same direction as a single T.I. leads. After twenty minutes of stretches, we get on the track and run five miles. After two, I'm getting winded and can feel my body wanting to give up. I'm not in as good of shape as I thought I was, but I push through it and eventually my body feels numb and my breathing evens out. Singing cadences while we run helps us to keep our breathing even, so I appreciate when Sergeant Brigham runs alongside us and starts singing.

I've realized something over the past week. I've let my marriage change who I am as a person. I absolutely love being a mom. But I also love being spontaneous and outgoing. I want to go out and have fun with my friends and take the kids on adventures. But I have succumbed to only being a mom and a wife. I hardly ever see my friends and they have stopped calling me. Things do change after you have kids, but the fun doesn't have to stop, right? It has to shift directions. Instead of staying up all night at the club, I should take the girls to the lake and have a picnic. I have been sitting in this comfort zone for too long, waiting. Waiting for what, though? For John to make me feel good again. That's laughable. I realize I can't live my life in my comfort zone anymore. I won't live my life in that comfort zone anymore. I will find who I am, and I hope John will be there to find out who she is too.

Afterward, everyone but me lays out in the grass, catching their breath and drinking water. I'm still walking around the track; I can't get out of my head.

Does John even love me? Am I just someone to be with, who he accidentally got knocked up? I mean, getting pregnant was accidental, but I wouldn't change it for the world. Does he stay with me for the kids' benefit? He usually pays no mind to them. I don't understand.

Then there's Sergeant Brigham. He makes me feel things my husband hasn't evoked in me, and he does it simply by looking at me. There is chemistry between us I can't explain, and I don't want to ignore it. But he is my training instructor, and I know there're rules about such things. After I am done here, I'll be going somewhere for tech school, and then off to my first base and he will be here. That won't work.

The rest of the day flies by as we march to and from different locations. We need to get to know our surroundings in case we need to go somewhere on our own or with a buddy. Sergeant Brigham takes us to where all the important buildings are. He then takes us over to the parade grounds and lets us wander around. This is where we will do our parade march at graduation. It's an enormous space, bigger than a football field, with lush green grass and the occasional flowerbed along the edge. There're rows and rows of bleachers around three quarters of the field for family to sit and watch. I look forward to that day. When my husband and girls are sitting there watching me march, knowing I've done them proud! Well, I will have made my girls proud, probably not my husband.

"Young!" Sergeant Brigham calls out to me from across the track. I look over and notice the whole flight is lined up and ready. I run over and take my spot in the flight and we march back to the dorms for dinner.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

BLAIR

The rest of the week flies by. I wasn't stopped again by any of the T.I.'s in The Snake Pit, which I am grateful for. Being the dorm mom isn't so bad because our flight is full of exceptional ladies who all look out for one another. Even though they could mess up every once in a while, a punishment wouldn't be so bad.

It's Saturday and we get to call home today. Earlier in the week we went to the B.X. to get anything else we needed and phone cards. The B.X., is like the base's version of a small Walmart. They only allow us to have two five-minute conversations or one ten-minute conversation. The phone booths in the recreational area are like old telephone booths you would see on the street, without doors. I go to the end booth and dial my home number.

"Hello?" John says

"Hi babe, it's me!"

"Oh, hey," he says in a flat tone "Um, how are things?"

"Not bad. Not as bad as I thought they would be. How are the girls?"

"Fine, I guess. You know how they are."

What is his problem? Am I supposed to assume everything is fine?

"I guess, yeah. Can I talk to them?"

"Yeah, I'll get them and put it on speaker," he scoffs, and I can hear his video game in the background pause.

He sounds irritated, like I'm making him go out of his way to let me talk to my girls.

"Okay that works."

I can hear him as he goes to get them. He sounds annoyed when he calls their names.

"Okay, they are here"

"Hi girls, its mommy!"

"Mama?" Avery says.

"Hi Mama!" says Kaylee

"Yes, Avery, its mommy. How are my girls doing?"

"I okay Mama. Not so fun," Kaylee says.

"Fun! Fun!" Avery says.

My heart tightens. Not fun, what does she mean, not fun? I'm sure she and her sister are having fun together, even if John doesn't willingly play with them.

"Not fun? I'm sorry, sweetie. But I love you more than you girls know, and I will hopefully see you in a few more weeks, okay?"

"Okay, Mama," Kaylee replies.

"I love you girls."

"Love you, Mama," they both say before I hear them run off together giggling.

"Quiet down!" I hear John say to them from a distance. God forbid they giggle and are too loud for him. Maybe he's having a hard day.

Hearing their voices gives me life and I can't wait for graduation and to have them with me again. Even if it's only for the day. I am doing this for them and that is what I must remember. I am giving them a life they deserve.

"Hey, they took off back to their room."

"Why did Kaylee say she's not having fun?"

"I don't know. She's three and she probably doesn't even understand the difference. Whatever," he says, still sounding annoyed, and the sounds from his first shooter game start up again. I have asked him many times not to play those violent games while the girls are awake.

"Well, I'm pretty sure she does so..."

The voice from the payphone cuts me off and tells me the call will end in thirty seconds. Five minutes will never be enough time.

"The phone call is about to end. I'm not sure when they will allow us to make calls again. Can you have the girl's color me some pictures or something and send them?"

"Yeah, sure I'll try." That would be a no, I'm sure. He doesn't care.

"Okay well, Love you."

"Yeah, you too. Bye."

And he hangs up before I even say bye back. As I put the phone back on the receiver, my heart drops. My daughter didn't sound happy, and John came off so cold to me. He didn't even tell me he loved me back. Why—no, I can't get lost in my emotions right now. I have one more five-minute phone call to make and I want to talk to my mom. I look around and see there is only one other girl left on the phone. We went in alphabetical order, so of course I am last with a last name like Young.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Mom!"

"Oh, Hi honey! I am so glad to hear from you. How are you? Do they treat you well? Do you eat enough?" she asks, always so concerned.

"Mom, I'm fine, yes and yes." A laugh escapes me. "So, listen, I just got off the phone with John and he was short with me. And the girls... well, Kaylee didn't sound happy, and she told me she's not having fun."

"Oh dear. How much time do you get to talk?"

I don't like where this is going.

"Well, five minutes but probably more like four now."

"Okay then I'll talk fast,"

Now I'm worried and my palms start sweating.

"I went over there last weekend to pick the girls up and take them out for lunch and to do a little shopping. You will not like this." She pauses and I'm shaking. Feeling anger rise inside me before she even tells me.

"The house is disgusting. I don't think he's touched it since you left. I'm not sure how he's cooking food, because the sink and counters are covered with dirty dishes. When I went into the girls' room, you couldn't even see the floor through all the toys and clothes. And the clothes they had

on looked like maybe they had been wearing them for a couple days. Very messy and the smell was pretty bad. After I left with the girls, I asked Kaylee if Daddy has helped clean up or done laundry and she told me no, that he sits and plays video games then tells her to clean but she can't because the mess is too big. It broke my heart."

My heart sinks and I'm so angry. Here I thought I was leaving my girls with a responsible, capable adult. Their own dad, who doesn't have a job, and nothing else to do. What the fuck is he doing all day? Fucking video games, I swear when I get home, I'm taking a bat to the fucking PlayStation.

"The girls and I had a great day though. I filled the fridge and a cupboard with easy to make meals and quick grab snacks for the girls. I also gave John fifty dollars because he said he had nothing and needed gas money."

I am crying now as the anger turns to sadness, I feel so helpless. I can barely hold the phone to my ear.

"I'm so sorry, honey. I wish there were more I could do."

"No, it's okay, Mom. He will figure it out. He's not used to it like I am."

That's how I'm justifying it in my brain.

I look up and the other girl who got off the phone is looking at me and I can see her mouth say, "I'm going to get Sergeant Brigham."

I am supposed to be having a favorable moment. Getting to call home and talk to my loved ones, but I'm crushed.

"Okay, Mom, well the phone is going to hang up any second. Thank you for taking the girls for the day and dropping off food. I love you."

"It's nothing. I love you too, honey."

\*Click\*

I fall to the ground and bring my knees to my chest; tuck my head and I sob. There is a heaviness in my chest, in my heart, like I haven't felt before. Why is he not even trying? Maybe he doesn't know what to do. The feeling of



helplessness and anger rip through my body, I throw my head back, squeeze my eyes shut and scream through my clenched teeth.

Then hands are on my shoulders, and a warmth is in front of me. His eyes looking at me with concern.

"What happened, Princess?"

Princess? It really is sticking, isn't it?

"My husband, he... he's not taking care of our children and our house. My mom said my house is a complete disaster area. When I called him, he didn't even tell me he loved me back." I cry again and Brigham gets down on his knees and pulls me into him. The smell of sandalwood, the feeling of his warm chest, and the sound of his heartbeat as I lay my head against him is like heaven to my senses right now. "My daughter," I choke a little as the tears flow, "she said she's not having fun. I don't know what she means." He slides one hand from my back into my hair and cradles my head against him. We could leave our hair down today because we had no actual plans. And it feels good to have it down and at this moment, it feels amazing having his hand in it.

"I'm not sure either, but let's hope it's not as bad as you are thinking."

"I hope not. Maybe my mom is exaggerating. But the way he spoke to me on the phone, so cold and flat, like he couldn't care less to be talking to me." I shudder with tears and he squeezes me a little tighter.

"Breathe, all right. Take some nice deep breaths with me"

I feel his chest rise and fall and take deep breaths with him. Calming my nerves and stopping my tears. He's so gentle. This big mean man who yells and screams at us daily is sitting here comforting me. Me! Shouldn't he tell me to suck it up buttercup and move on. Isn't that what T.I.'s do?

"You know, Princess. This is becoming a thing." I look up at him with wonder. His gorgeous green eyes pulling me in.

“What is? Me being an emotionally needy girl who has to toughen up and deal with it?”

“What! No! You are tough,” he says with shock and a small chuckle. He grabs me under the arms and gets me standing. I fall back to the wall of the phone booth and my heart races as he looks over me as if checking to make sure I am okay otherwise. Then he brings his hand to the side of my face and I lean into it, closing my eyes. He leans down into my neck and kisses a slow path from the neckline of my shirt to my ear.

“Our thing, Princess, is me breaking every rule, one at a time for you.”

His breaths are heavy on the space behind my ear and my whole body shivers with goosebumps. I look up and meet his gaze.

“But why? Why me?”

He grabs my hand and brings it to his mouth while dipping his head down, still holding my stare.

“I’m not sure yet, but sometimes rules are meant to be broken and, in your case, I’ll burn the whole damn rule book.”

He kisses my hand gently, drops it and takes a step back.

“I should probably get you back inside before they wonder what’s taking so long and send search and rescue.”

I giggle and it feels good to smile, even if it is for a second.



As I FOLLOW him back to the dorms, I cannot help but stare at his ass. His ABU top might cover some of it, but this man has an exceptional ass.

“I can feel you staring at me, Young,” he says, and I can tell by how he says it, he is smiling.

"I can't help it, sir. With an ass like that, it's asking to be looked at." I cover my mouth quickly with my hands, smiling behind them. Yes, I like this new me. Don't hold back. He looks back at me from the corner of his eye.

"You're lucky it's broad daylight," he says, and turns back around to head up the steps.

"And why's that, sir?"

He turns around and I have to look almost straight up. He is not only a foot taller than me normally but now has an added step to his height. He reaches toward me and puts his thumb to my bottom lip, slowly dragging it down.

"Because, with a mouth like that, its asking for me to take it."

Then he's up the stairs, and in the dorm before I even register what he said.

Back inside, I can see most eyes on me. I'm sure my face is red and swollen from crying.

"Are you okay?" Sam asks, looking up from her journal at me.

"I'll be fine. My husband needs to pull his head out of his ass."

"Some men aren't worth it, Blair," she says as she looks at me with sympathy in her eyes.

"I know but he's the father of my children." I slump down in my bed trying to find my strength and not cry.

"My dad left me and my mom, you know," she says with confidence in her voice

"Really?"

"Yup. When I was four, he left my mom for another woman. Then two years later my mom found Chris. He's my dad now."

"Wow, Sam, I'm sorry you had to go through such a hard thing."

"Don't be. Just because the man gave me life doesn't mean he needs to be *in* my life. Chris is my dad in every other way."

"That's great, Sam. I'm glad you have him in your life."

"Yeah, me too." She smiles and goes back to writing in her journal.

I lay down and try not to let my mind get away from me. I'm sure he isn't used to this lifestyle; he will get it together. Maybe I can ask my friend Sarah to stop over and help him clean up the house and get caught up on the laundry. I know she never liked John, but she would also do anything for my girls. She's the only friend I have held onto while I became a hermit. It's not long before thinking becomes too hard and I sleep.

WEEK

*three*

## CHAPTER NINE

BLAIR

**A** new week and a new set of challenges begin. This week we start classes. We must pass an exam before we can graduate. Some classes we have to take are Air Force History, Basic Leadership, and Human Relations. I relate to humans, so maybe that class won't be so bad.

After breakfast, we march to the dorms for showers and a meeting in the common room before we head to our first class.

"Do you think classes are going to be hard?" Sam asks me as we make our way to the common room. Sergeant Brigham isn't there yet, so the room is loud with chatter. Hens.

"I do," I say and she lets out a fake cry and I can't help but giggle. "I only think it's going to be hard because it's another thing we have to concentrate on and remember. I don't think the actual course work will be a challenge."

"Well, that makes me feel a little better. Maybe we can choose our seats. Will you sit with me?"

I look at her and she looks at me and we both bust up laughing. Yeah, right, like they would ever let that happen.

"Good morning, ladies," Sergeant Brigham says as he enters the room. Looking handsome as ever in his ABU's, he's carrying a big white plastic tote in with him.

"Today you start classes. You will have two classes a day for the next two weeks before you take your test. Carter, come here and help pass these out." Elizabeth Carter gets up and walks up to the table, taking an arm full of binders from him. He grabs an arm full of black bags and starts passing them out.

"Here are your backpacks and notebooks. I expect you to remember to bring these to class with you. Each bag has a

pack of pens and pencils, whichever you prefer. There are also quick note guides for each class."

I get my bag and binder and look inside. The first thing I see is a quick reference guide to the rank structure. It doesn't seem too hard. I flip through the rest of them before putting my binder in my backpack.

Sergeant Brigham grabs the box and says, "You have ten minutes to finish whatever you need to do then I want you lined up at attention on the pad."

He seems like he's in a kind of crabby mood. Maybe it's cause it's Monday and who wants to go to work on a Monday. Specially with a flight of whiny chicks. Ok, maybe we aren't that whiney but some of them can be. We have our days too.

We get to the pad in record time and march to our first class. We file in and sit down, and that's when I realize, this is going to suck. I sweat instantly. Why is it so damn hot in this room?

"Hello class. My name is Sergeant Hill, and I will be your teacher for the next two weeks. I'm sure you have all noticed the air conditioning doesn't work in the classroom. This is for a reason. Not only are you here to learn, but you are also here to test your ability to stay alert. The heat makes you tired, but you have to fight it. If you feel like you are going to fall asleep, drink water. If drinking water doesn't help, you are welcome to stand off to the side or in the back of the classroom as long as you are still paying attention."

Everyone in the room straightens up as if that's going to help. Luckily, I'm a mom and staying up is my talent. Long nights of crying babies and no sleep. But I get my canteen out, just in case.

"We are going to start with Air Force History and then focus a little more on rank structure."

The rest of the class goes quick. Air Force History is extremely boring, but I took good notes. No one fell asleep,



thank goodness.



THE NEXT DAY classes aren't until after dinner. We file in as we did yesterday and take our seats, but the atmosphere in the room is different. It is hotter than yesterday, and everyone seems more tired after a day of PT, marching, drills and bellies full of food.

"Good evening class," the teacher says as he stands from his desk. Sergeant Brigham is standing at the back tonight, maybe he has nothing better to do.

"This evening we will continue on with Air Force history and touch on rank structure again."

History has never been my favorite subject. Facts are significant and all, but I would rather let my mind get lost in a great fictional story.

The teacher goes on about how in 1947 the Air Force became a separate military service but was once another part of the Army. And that was the last thing I heard.

"hhhhmmmmhhhhmmmm hhhhhhhuuuuuuush little baby, don't say a word, Sergeant Brigham's gonna buy you...."

"Oh, shit!" I say as I launch up from the sound of Sergeant Brigham singing a lullaby in my ear. When did I fall asleep? Was I out long? Oh god, everyone is staring at me.

"So glad you could join us again, Trainee Young. Now if you don't mind, you need to stand at the back of the class with your things. I would hate to bore you into slumber again," the teacher says. I gather my things and go to the back. No one looks at me. Hopefully, everyone won't have to pay for my mistake.

As I head to the back of the class, Sergeant Brigham is already there with a smug smile on his face. I grab my binder and pen, lean against the wall with my foot propped

up behind me, trying to balance my binder on my knee so I can take notes.

Sergeant Brigham leans over and whispers in my ear, "You don't have to stay up all night thinking about me. You should rest when you can."

I let out a small chuckle, but catch it with my hand before anyone notices or hears me. I look over at him from the corner of my eye and he winks before he steps away from the wall and down the aisle of students, checking to see if anyone else is asleep. They would be so lucky to have him sing in their ear. His voice isn't half bad.

## CHAPTER TEN

BLAIR

**I**t is too early to function and after yesterday, no one wants to go to PT. One girl got caught with a peanut butter pack hiding in her bed and because of it we had to go to the parade grounds and do formation practice for three hours. And in the Texas heat, it sucked balls.

The other flights are waiting out on the pad with us for breakfast to start and the four T.I.'s are all talking with each other. That's not a good sign. Who knows what they are scheming for us to do?

"What!" I hear from one of the T.I.'s. He's a shorter guy, but all bulk. Dark chocolate skin and amazing amber eyes.

"I said what I said," Sergeant Brigham said with a laugh at the end.

"All right, it's on. One minute, who can do the most," said the T.I.

"Don't cry in front of your flight when I whoop your ass."

"I'm not worried, pretty sure you're all bark and no bite."

Well, I sure hope he has some bite. I feel a tinge between my thighs thinking about Sergeant Brigham's teeth on my skin. Feeling his fiery breath drag down my neck.

Sergeant Brigham turned to the flights.

"Sergeant Brookes thinks he can do more push-ups than me!"

A laugh comes from our flight, knowing our T.I. is strong as fuck because he's already challenged all of us.

"Trainee Young, count on my behalf"

Oh fuck, what? Is he insane? I walk up to the front next to him while the other T.I. finds a trainee to count for him. He grabs my elbow and pulls me back a little as if it's a secret how to count push-ups. He takes a deep breath as if he's breathing me in and looks at me. I can see the want

and desire in his eyes, and it sparks something in me again. This man looks at me like I give him life, like he would be happy to walk away right now with me under his arm and never look back.

“Hi, Princess,”

Again, with the princess? I’m coming to like this princess thing. Does that mean I’m crawling into a space inside his head and heart?

“For this to be fair, you are going to get down in front of me to make sure you get an accurate count.”

“Okay, sir.”

“Also,” he leans in a little closer and turns his head to whisper in my ear, pulling his hat off his head, and pushing it towards me to hold. Then taking his ABU top off and handing it to me. “Hold these and don’t break eye contact with me. I know watching your beautiful blue eyes will give me the strength I need to beat his sorry ass.”

He pulls away to take his top off and winks at me and my heart and my stomach do somersaults. Is this real, are we falling for each other? It’s not the right time and certainly not the right place. I’m married and that’s that... At least, I think I still want to be married. No time for those thoughts. The T.I.’s are getting into position, so the other trainee and I sit down in front to count.

One of the female T.I.’s stands behind us and says, “All right assholes, here are the rules. You start when I say start, you stop when I say stop and your elbows must hit a forty-five-degree angle.”

Sergeant Brigham looks up at me with determination in his eyes and I can’t help but smile, hoping no one else caught it because I probably looked like a love-struck schoolgirl.

“Ready, set, go!”, yells the female T.I.

Keeping eye contact with him feels like the easiest thing I have done since I got here. His are the prettiest shade of bright green. He keeps his eyes locked and I feel like I am

giving him the strength he needs to win. I can see the sweat glisten on his forehead and his breathing becoming harder as he pumps up and down. After thirty seconds, I chance a look over at Sergeant Brookes and I hear a small growl from Sergeant Bringham. I look back to see him slightly glaring at me. Apparently not too happy that I broke eye contact.

*Oh, to be the ground underneath this man right now.*

Shoot! I really hope I didn't say that out loud. According to the unchanged look on Sergeant Bringham's face, I'm guessing I didn't.

"Stop!" the female T.I. yells.

After one minute, both men are breathing heavy and sit back. I stand and tell the female T.I. that Sergeant Bringham did eighty-nine pushups. I look back at him as he stands up and his shirt is clinging to his body from sweat and I can certainly make out his defined chest. I bite my lip to keep myself from going there. I slowly bring my eyes back up to him and he's staring at me with a slight smirk on his face. Yeah, he totally caught me ogling his body.

"Congrats Sergeant Bringham, you beat Brookes by eight."

Our whole flight cheers for him, and he grins wide. Bringham looks over at Brookes, shrugs and bites the air towards him. "Guess I've got a little more bite than you thought, huh?"

"Whatever, I let you win."

"Whatever you have to tell yourself." He pats Sergeant Brookes back hard a couple times.

Sergeant Bringham turns back to me, slowly reaching for his hat and top then whispers, "Thanks, Princess, now get your sweet ass back in formation."

I bite my lip to keep myself from swooning at him. He makes the fire inside me grow and glow more after every interaction we have.

After he puts his hat and top back on Sergeant Brigham tells us we are going to have a day of relaxation. He doesn't care what we do, but we have to stay in the dorms.

He spends the rest of the morning closed off in his office while we sit around chatting and refold our already folded clothes. I write a letter to my girls and my mom, and braid hair for five of the girls in the flight. I've become kind of mother hen to the girls right around me.

I'm still in knots over the fact that my husband hasn't sent me anything from the girls, and after my first phone call home, he didn't seem to care. I got to talk to my girls for a minute, but they are so young, phone conversations don't last long. John told me he still can't find a job, I'm sure he isn't even looking, and he wants to take the girls to my mom's for the weekends so he can job hunt. I don't believe a word he says, and I wish I knew what he was doing. I guess I'll ask tomorrow when we get to make our calls home. He was so cold with me on the phone and our connection has faded. The man that gave me two of the most special gifts in my life is becoming the reason for the most anger in my life.

"Trainee Young, my office, now," Sergeant Brigham calls out.

I rush over as fast as possible, being careful not to slip on the polished floor. I decided I was going to hang out in socks all day. It feels amazing to not have boots on my feet. I would prefer to be barefoot. I stop at his door and he looks concerned.

"Yes, sir?" I question.

"Come in, shut the door and sit down. You have a phone call."

I do as I am told, and he hands me the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hi, honey. It's Mom"

I choke up. Hearing her voice makes me so happy but also concerned about why she needed to get a hold of me

now and not wait for me to call this weekend when we have our phone time.

"Hi Mama, how are you? How are the girls? Do you know? How's John? Did he tell you he wants to bring the girls to you for the weekend...?"

"Honey, I'm good but listen. I called you because John just left my house. He brought the girls with bags of clothes and toys. He told me he needed money to help with gas, so I gave him twenty dollars. Then he told me he can't handle this anymore and he won't be coming back for the girls."

My heart stops. Sadness grips my chest, and tears sting the back of my eyes. "He what? He doesn't want to be there for them anymore? He doesn't want to be their daddy? I don't understand."

"I'm not sure, honey and he didn't want to explain any further than that. He turned around and walked out the door. He didn't even say goodbye to them."

That's when the tears start. He walked out of their lives, like they were nothing.

"I don't even know what to say, Mom. Can you take care of them? I can't leave. I don't know what to do."

I chance a look up at Brigham's face and he's watching me with sadness in his eyes.

"Listen, I can take care of them, but I will need some help to pay for daycare while I am at work. Can you transfer your paycheck into my bank account?"

"I'm not sure, but I will ask, but I don't see why it would be an issue. Use whatever money you need."

I can hear my girls in the background playing and laughing. Their little voices make my heart heavy knowing their daddy just abandoned them.

"Okay honey, well get a pen and write down my bank info."

I ask Brigham for a pen and sticky note. He hands it to me, but the hard line of his lips tells me he's concerned.



"Thanks, Mom. This means the world to me. I wish there was more I could do, but my hands are tied from here. Even if I wanted to leave, I can't give up on giving my girls the life they deserve."

"I love you honey, and don't worry about them. They are in excellent hands and even if he comes back, I won't let him take them."

"I love you too."

I hang up the phone and lose it. Sadness rips through me and I cry hard. My husband, the father to my children, walked away. He left us. Who does that? Who gives up and doesn't care?

After a few minutes, I feel Sergeant Brigham's hand on my shoulder. I turn in my chair and look up at him with tears still in my eyes. He reaches down with both hands and pulls me up into a hug. His arms around me are a welcoming feeling. I rest my head on his warm, hard chest and breathe him in, the smell of sandalwood and ocean air tickling my nose.

"I'm sorry," he says.

"He left..." I say in a low cracking voice, "he left my girls with my mom and said he won't be going back for them."

The reality is hitting me, and I start to feel numb.

"What do I do?" I ask him and look up to him as if he has some sort of answer for me.

He looks down and says, "Whatever you have to do. You're a strong woman, Blair and I know this is only a test of your strength, but you will only be stronger for it."

He puts his hand lightly on the side of my face and wipes a tear away then brushes his thumb across my lips. I shudder from the contact. I lick my lower lip as he holds my stare. His other hand wraps around the back of my neck and the next moment our lips are joined. His lips are soft on mine. He doesn't push for more, and he pulls away. I'm left breathless, my eyes wide with shock. I'm a married woman, at least...by law I am, and he's... well, he's not supposed to

do this with a trainee. But that jolt, when his lips touched mine, shot right through my body and I want to feel it again. It made me feel alive for a second.

He pulls his hand away from my neck and says, "I'm sorry, I... I shouldn't have done that. I'm not sure..."

I reach up, with both my hands, grabbing either side of his face and bring him down to me. I kiss him and that shock in my body catches me off guard again and has me breaking away this time. Our eyes lock and there're unspoken words said. We both know this isn't right, we both understand the trouble we can get into, but I have never had a man be so gentle with me while I'm hurting. Is this genuine, is this man standing here holding me wanting me even though my life is obviously a mess? I slide my fingers into his hair, and he lets a low moan escape his mouth, letting his eyes close and head fall back slightly. He places his hands on my hips and lifts me from the chair to my feet. I watch his eyes move between mine. He's waiting for me; he's waiting for me to give him some sign what's happening is okay with me. I'm not the best with words so I do the next best thing and crash my lips onto his again. This time, embracing that feeling, letting it take over and warm me to my core.

His grip on me gets tighter and his kiss harder. I feel his tongue at my lips, and I part them to let him inside to explore. One of his hands works its way up my back and into my hair. His other hand pulls my hips against him and I whimper as the heat from his body warms mine. I push harder against his mouth, taking everything I can from him in this moment when I feel like I've lost everything. His hand grazes my cheek, and he pulls away slightly, enough to look me in the eyes.

"I'm not sure what you are doing to me, but he's obviously an idiot for giving you and your daughters up."

He turns and sits us down in the armless chair I was in. Me on his lap, so I'm straddling him.

"I'm not sure..." I try to say, thinking I'm not sure what I'm feeling or thinking or doing, but he interrupts me.

"Don't think about it. Like I said before. I will break all the rules for you." And he brushes a light kiss at the dip in my neck. At this point I don't care about the rules all I want is this man. How he makes me feel, how he looks at me with such desire. I bring my hands to his chest and unbutton his ABU top, untuck his tan shirt and slowly feel my way up his chest. He inhales sharply and lets his head fall back.

"I have dreamed of how your hands would feel on me."

I lift his shirt and look at his ripped chest and amazing six pack. The tattoo on his chest is of a phoenix rising from flames. Which tells me he possibly has a story of his own. Slowly, as if he is trying to remember each moment, he runs his hands from my hips up underneath my shirt, I can feel his rough hands against my skin, and it makes my thighs clench around him. His hands find their way to my breast and he moves my sports bra up. He dips his head down and takes one of my nipples into his mouth, biting down lightly and sucking. The heat between my legs is now on fire and I grind into him, feeling the length of him under his ABU pants.

"I want you," I say with my cheek against the top of his head. Holding to my chest, loving the way his mouth feels on my nipples. He pulls away but replaces his mouth with his hand and looks up at me.

"Unfortunately, Princess, I want to hear you scream out my name, and I don't think the rest of the ladies in the dorm would appreciate such a thing." A little laugh leaves his mouth.

A small part of me would not even care if they heard my screams right now.

"Then make me forget for a few more minutes."

His hand is down between our legs, pushing my shorts aside. Thank god I changed into PT gear. His other still on my breast. He catches my mouth with his and he kisses me

like I'm his next meal, meanwhile, his fingers playing a cruel game between my legs as he inches closer and closer to the place where I need relief.

"Sir, please...?" I pant as I ask. And that's all it took. He slides his finger inside me while his thumb circled my tender nub. "Damn, Princess, you are so wet for me."

He slides another finger inside, and the fullness has my body aching for more. I grab his head and pull it into my chest as I fuck his hand. He bites and sucks at my nipples while my orgasm grows. He kisses and nips up my neck, then crashes his lips on mine. I lose it and he catches each whimper and moan with his mouth as my orgasm overwhelms me.

"Princess, I think we just broke most of the rules in the book."

He smiles, and I can't help but smile back and graze his lips with a kiss.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

JAKE

**A**fter I close the door behind her, I sit back in my chair and stare at the ceiling. Fuck! That may not have been the smartest thing to do, but damn. I can't help but do what she wants; what she seems to need. She wanted me to help her take the pain away, to forget for a few minutes. And if she wants something, I feel compelled to give it to her. Whatever she desires from me, fuck the rules. I don't care anymore.

I don't understand how a man could ever leave his kids and wife. He must be a real douchebag. How did she ever fall in love with him, or was she even in love with him, or did something else happen? Seeing her cry ripped my heart out of my chest. I couldn't bear to see her upset. I don't want her to cry over him again. She must know she is better than that. She deserves better than that.

Where is this going? I drag my hands down my face and can smell her on my fingers. She felt so amazing riding my hand. Letting me help her forget, even if it was for a short amount of time. I wanted so badly to lay her on my desk and drive into her. Hear her scream out my name when I help her release all her anger and frustration.

After basic, she has to leave for tech school, and I'll have an assignment to a new flight. I'll be in San Antonio for at least one more year and she will be lord knows where. I can't up and move. Unfortunately, the military doesn't work that way. And I can't very well marry her as soon as she graduates. I let those thought spiral in my head for a second before pushing it out. Don't be stupid, she's married and even if she isn't happy, she's still legally married.

I stand to leave my office, locking away anymore thoughts. I chance a look at Blair as I walk to the front of the dorm. She's leaning against her locker, staring at the

ceiling with tears falling from the sides of her eyes. But she's silent, her face like stone, showing no emotion. I want to hold her. Give her something to hold on to. But for now, all I can do is keep her busy.

"All right ladies, put your shit on and let's get some chow."

The chow hall is quiet because I brought my flight a little early. I didn't feel like dealing with the stress of all the yelling and being obligated to be an asshole. I still have to move my flight through the chow hall fast though. I can't let them know I'll be a good guy outside the common room. I sit at the Snake Pit and watch as the ladies file through, getting their food and sitting down to eat. It's kind of nice being the only flight in here right now. Blair has nothing but a couple peanut butter cups and a water on her tray.

"Trainee Young, come here!" I yell out to her.

She walks over, her head down, a frown splayed across her face.

"Yes, sir?"

"I know what happened is hard and you probably don't feel like eating but you have to keep your strength up, okay?" Sometimes, even when I don't like it, I have to tell trainees what to do. And with as much energy as we exert during the day, a complete meal is what she needs to keep up her strength.

"I understand."

"At least grab yourself one of the main meal options, all right? I don't want you passing out during P.T."

"Yes, sir," she says, but I know she doesn't want to.

"You can go back through the line, sit at the last table so you have more time. I want you to eat, so don't rush."

"Thank you, sir," she says and turns away to head back through the line.

The rest of the girls are done and already heading back to the dorm by the time she gets to her table. I walk over to her, put my hand on her shoulder and squeeze slightly.

Looking down at her, I see a single tear roll down her face and I want nothing more than to kiss it away.

"You stay here as long as you need. Come back to the dorms when you're done."

She looks up at me, her eyes red from crying. "Okay."

My heart clenches in my chest. *I want to make your pain go away Blair*

"Good Night Ladies," I say as I head out of the dorms for the evening. My drive home is my time to decompress. I unlock my doors, throw my stuff in then pull back the soft top. One nice thing about living in Texas, I can go most of the year driving with my convertible top down.

I live about fifteen miles from base so the drive isn't horribly long. Graduation day should be fun. If this is my last flight, I won't be upset missing the meet and greets with parents. They just want to see where their little babies have been for the past six weeks. I think Blair will enjoy a nice day at the lake. I know she will miss having her family with her but at least she won't be alone, watching everyone else with their families. We can rent some jet skis and have some fun on the water.

Once I'm off base I turn on some nineties rock and blast the stereo. One way I like to destress is singing at the top of my lungs. Another is the gym, which I think I will hit up tonight. I cruise the highway singing along to "Fuel" by Metallica and can't help but wonder what Blair's favorite music is? What does she like to listen to when she drives? Or does she like listening to music at all? Maybe she likes to read? Or cook? Or hike? There is so much I don't know about her but am dying to find out. Hopefully while we are at the lake, we can have a lot of those fun "get to know each other" conversations.

I drive another fifteen minutes and decide the gym can wait for another day. Once I am home, I check on and feed my goldfish, Winston. One day I will have a cat. It's odd that I love cats so much yet bought a goldfish. I don't have the



time for a pet that needs much more care than a goldfish, but I also needed something to talk to in the evenings, so I don't feel like a crazy person. Even though, if people heard me talking to a goldfish, they would probably think I'm off my rocker. Being in my mid twenties, I either have friends that are married and starting a family or are still young and want to go out most nights. I'm stuck in the middle. I enjoy the occasional night out with the guys, but I am also ready to stay home, make popcorn and watch HGTV with my wifey. So instead, I spend most night sitting on my couch, eating meals for one and watching HGTV while discussing home upgrades with Winston. Yeah, I'm living the life.

I grab my laptop from the coffee table and power it up. A few clicks and I notice I am still waiting on approval for my cross training. Being an aircraft mechanic or a "crew chief" as they are called, is not the most glamorous job, but I need something different. I love working on my car, getting my hands greasy while taking things apart and putting them back together again. And that is just a little car engine I get to crank over when I am done. The roar of a jet engine does not even compare, its invigorating. I hope I hear something soon. This "hurry up and wait" thing is really starting to irritate me.

I put my laptop back on the table and sit back against the couch, flipping through channels mindlessly. When I think about what direction my life is going in, I cannot help but think about Blair.

She has a maturity I don't see in most women my age. She had to grow up quick because she had kids at a younger age. I've never dealt directly with kids before, but I grew up with three siblings and tons of cousins. I have always known I want to be a dad, whether it be my biological kids or kids I can love as my own.

It is hard to think about these things because I don't know that there is a future between me and Blair, even though I want there to be. I get worried there may be too

much baggage. The obvious being she is still technically married but her soon to be ex-husband is obviously out of his damn mind, is he going to be a big problem in the future? I know Blair wants nothing to do with him anymore, but what about the kids? I feel like I want to be the stability in her life that she might be missing. I want to treat her like a woman should be treated and provide for her like a man should want to do for his family.

"Well, Winston? What do you think?"

He looks at me with his bugged-out eyes and blows bubbles.

"I agree, buddy. She is pretty amazing."

WEEK

four

## CHAPTER TWELVE

BLAIR

**B**usy day today, blues fitting, and I have a meeting with a lawyer. There isn't much I can do from where I am right now, but at least I can get some direction and possibly peace of mind.

The blues uniform, or the dress uniform, for females is quite cute. Navy blue skirt with a light blue form fitting button-up shirt with cute black heeled shoes. At least, that's what I'll wear once I'm out of here. For now, it's a long sleeve shapeless light blue shirt tucked in navy slacks, a heavy navy jacket with shoulder pads and the worst shiny black loafers I have ever seen.

Once I have changed into my new outfit, I make my way out to the tailor and spy Sergeant Brigham standing in the doorway talking to another T.I. As if he can feel my eyes on him, he looks over from his conversation; he looks at me and then... he *looks* at me, drinks me in. His eyes are all over my body and every nerve in me is firing. I hold back a smile as I step up and turn towards the mirrors. I can still see him from the corner of the mirror, checking out the back side of me this time while still mumbling and shaking his head to whatever the other T.I. is saying, not missing a beat. The tailor comes over and measures, making sure my slacks are the right length and my sleeves aren't too long.

I guess after being seen in a baggy uniform for weeks; Sergeant Brigham considers this pretty sexy given the way he hasn't taken his eyes off me. Once the tailor's done, I turn to walk away, stealing a glance at Sergeant Brigham while biting my lip and give him a little wink. I make sure once I've turned and start walking away; I add a little extra sway to my hips. The best I can anyway in these awful shoes.



AT THE LAWYER'S OFFICE, I feel sick to my stomach. I still can't believe I am in this position and need to get legal advice.

"Trainee Young, what can I help you with today?" the young Staff Sergeant asks me. How do I get this job? Sitting in an office giving advice all day. I'm sure he does other stuff but by the looks of this fully furnished office, I would say he doesn't leave often unless it's to go home.

"Well, my husband left my kids with my mom and moved out of state. So, I suppose I need to know the process for getting a divorce and what I should do for my kids."

"Unfortunately, Trainee Young, you can't start the divorce process here. You will have to do it in the state you reside in. So, you can either wait until you get to your first base or you could try to start the process while you're in tech school, but it will have to be in whatever state you were married in. As for the kids, you need to give your mom power of attorney over them. Do you and your husband share a bank account?"

"Yes, we do, but my mom will need money for daycare."

"You can go to finance after this and either set up a new bank account or give them your mom's account information. It looks like this is your fourth week of training, so you have already received one paycheck. If you change the information today, your next one shouldn't be deposited into to the shared account."

He pauses for a minute and types some stuff on his computer. My stomach isn't any calmer than it was when I got here. As long as my mom has rights over my kids, I will wait until I get to my first base to start the divorce process. I want to make it through tech school without the distraction, honestly.

"Here you are Young, these are the powers of attorney you need to sign. Copies will be sent to your mom. These

forms also have their medical information, for insurance, if she needs to take them to the doctor for any reason.”

I grab a pen and sign the papers. I feel like a slight weight has been lifted. A small one though, cause my girls and I aren’t all the way out of the clear from John.

“Thank you, sir,” I say as I stand.

“Absolutely. Now head over to finance, I will get a message to your T.I. that you are heading there so he knows you will be late. The finance building is the next building over, to the right when you walk out the doors.”

“Okay. Thank you again. I feel a little better.” I turn and walk out. This is all very surreal. I knew our marriage wasn’t the greatest, but I honestly thought we could work through it and yet here I am setting up another fresh path for my life to walk down, as a single mom.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**B**lair

This has probably been the most stressful week. Having to deal with all of this from so far away, still actively being in the basic training state of mind, and keeping a mask up around my flight has been exhausting. Everyone already knows my home life is a wreck, but that's what happens when you break down in the bathroom and six girls surround you and you spill your guts about your husband... or soon to be ex-husband. So, now the entire flight knows, but I won't let myself walk around being Debbie Downer all day every day. Hopefully, with everything I have gotten done this week, I won't have any more surprises.

Sleep has been fleeting, and I feel exhausted. Mentally and physically. Like the mental part is taking a toll on my body. Hopefully, during P.T. this morning, I can concentrate at the task at hand. And then the rest of the day, I don't know, I guess float. I don't have any appointments today, which is a relief, and tomorrow I get to call my mom to discuss graduation.

All the surrounding girls seem to be in such a good mood as we make our way over to the track. We're supposed to be running today. I enjoy running now, especially when



Sergeant Brigham runs with us singing cadences. I can think through things while also clearing my mind.

We are all lined up to start stretches with one of the female T.I.'s leading. Sergeant Brigham still stands in front of our flight, making sure everyone does their stretches correctly. We stretch our arms above our heads for a ten count, then sit on the ground. Everything in me wants to lie on the warm pavement and take a nap.

Everyone goes to stand, and my body feels weak. My head a little fuzzy. Did I drink any water before bed last night? My eyesight goes blurry, and I can't stay balanced. It felt like a wave of heat mixed with the pressure of all the stress from the week hit me and knocked me on my ass. I hit the ground, still aware, my lips feeling tingly and my head feeling foggy. I can hear the girls around me gasping and calling for help.

The next thing I know, Sergeant Brigham is there lifting me to my feet, but I can't find my footing. He lifts me into his arms and my head falls to his shoulder.

"I'm going to take her to the nurse," he says.

We start walking back to the dorms and my head begins to clear, and my body stops tingling. Being cradled in his muscular arms feels amazing. I lift my head to look up at him and he stops.

"Hey," I say in a groggy voice and a slight smile on my face.

"Hi, Princess. You gave me a good scare back there," he says. He looks at me with relief and happiness.

"I think I can walk now," I say, even though I don't want him to put me down.

"Nope," he says and continues walking.

Luckily, the track is across from our dorms and the nurses' room is only at the other end of the building so he won't have to carry me far. But he heads the opposite way, and we were going up the steps to our dorm.

"I thought I had to go to the nurse?" I am confused because I figured he would want to get me checked out. I am sure it was lack of water and the stress from the week.

"I think I can handle taking care of you."

He opens the door to the dorms and locked it behind him.

"The cold air feels so good," I say, laying my head back to hang.

He lays me down on my bed and sits at the foot. I hitch up on my elbows.

"I'm really okay," I say with a smile on my face.

"Passing out is never okay. Did you drink water last night?"

"No, I think I forgot. My mind has been all over the place this week. I think everything hit me this morning." I lay back down bringing my hands to my face letting out an exasperated groan.

He scootches up the bed and grabs one of my hands and lifts it to look at my face and says, "Yeah, that probably has a lot to do with it. What you're going through isn't fair."

I sit up, bring my knees to my chest and my chin to my knees, trying not to look at him while trying not to feel so pathetic.

"I'm sorry Sergeant Brigham," I say. "I have been nothing but a burden this entire time and I'm not sure what you see in me."

"Jake," he says, and I look up at him confused. He notices the confused look on my face and says, "Jake, that's my name."

"Oh. Okay. Yeah, I like your name." Oh my god, really? I like your name? Dumbass what are you like six? I internally bang my head against a wall. I hide my face again.

"Come on," he says, "why are you being shy with me now?"

I look up, and he has the cutest curve to his lips, and I can't help but smile back and drop my guard. I drop my

knees into a crisscross apple sauce posture.

"Can I tell you something?" I ask.

"Of course, you can."

"I came here because it was like a last option. My husband got fired and he wouldn't get just any job to support us. I don't have any college experience, and hardly any work experience because I got pregnant so early in life. I joined because I wanted to give my girls the life they deserve and thought maybe my husband would look at me different, and maybe be proud of me." Tears are falling now, and I feel like I'm breaking all over again. "He doesn't make me feel valued, pretty, important, or like I was even worthy of being with him. I'm not even sure why he stayed. But you," my voice hitches, "you came out of nowhere; I was not expecting this. You make me feel things he's never made me feel. You have helped me realize this is not my fault. You make me feel pretty and wanted." He grabs my hands in his and brings them to his mouth and kisses them. Dropping my hands, he hikes his knee onto the bed to turn towards me and I say, "This feels fated but at the same time doomed. This has no future. I don't even know where I am going after this and you will still be here." He brushes some hair from my face that had fallen out of my ponytail. His touch sends shivers down my spine. He cups my face.

"It seems fated and unfair, but I'm not ready to give up."

"I'm not either," I say. We stare at each other for a few seconds. His hand moves from my face to the nape of my neck. He pulls me closer, and his lips are on mine. He sends heat through my entire body and it makes me ache in new ways again. His other hand finds my hip, and I crawl into his lap, straddling him. We are like life to each other, each other's oxygen, we can't get enough. Tongues twisting, hands grabbing, not getting enough. I broke away, breathing heavily, locking eyes with him.

"I want you."

He smiles slyly. "Wanna try again, Princess?" And that is the only clue I needed.

"I want you, sir," I say with a bit of an attitude. He roughly pulls my shirt off over my head and then gently removes my sports bra, watching my breast bounce out, my nipples harder than ever. His mouth is on one, and his arms are around me, pulling me closer. I roll my hips into him, feeling his length under his P.T. shorts.

"Oh, god," he lets out a light moan. "Blair. Your body feels amazing against me."

I pull his shirt up. "It would feel even better without these annoying clothes." After I get his shirt off, I run my hands down his impeccable torso, his muscles hardening under my touch.

"I need you, sir."

"You got it, Princess."

In one swift movement, he grabs me and puts me back down on the bed, leaning over me. He starts kissing my neck, and I turn to give him more access. His kisses start traveling down my body, stopping at each nipple with a little nibble and kiss. He makes his way down my stomach and to the waistband of my shorts. My breathing became faster and my need for him stronger.

"Do you have a condom?" He looks up and kind of looked worried and confused.

"Um... I do! It's in my backpack in my office. Don't move."

"No problem," I say, blushing.

He gets up quickly and makes his way to his office. I kick off my shoes and finish taking off the rest of my clothes. I can hear the condom wrapper ripping as he's coming back.

"Damn!" he says. Eyes on me grazing over my entire body, "Your body is amazing."

I sit up to pull down his shorts, but he beats me to it. He rolls the condom on, the whole time I'm watching his every move, wanting to grab his thick penis. He crawls back onto

the bed and settles between my legs. He kisses me softly and says, "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure." I say, my breathing shaking slightly, "I don't think I have ever been so sure about another person in my life." We kiss each other again and all the air escapes me. I love that he's making sure. He doesn't want to push me too fast, but I feel like it's all been moving so fast and that's our pace.

The head of his penis grazes between my legs, he pushes between my folds and rubs up and down against my bundle of nerves. He kisses and sucks my neck and my entire body shudders. I grab his shoulders and dig my nails in pulling him as close to me as possible, lifting my hips to him trying to entice him in.

"Oh, god," I say "Please, I need you inside me."

"I'm sorry, what's that, Princess?" he asks grazing his lips over mine. His hand moving up my hip. My body aching for him.

"Fuck me, sir."

He pushes the head of his cock at my opening, and with one quick motion thrusts inside me. I gasp. He stretches me but the burn was welcoming. He slowly works himself in and out. He grabs my leg and wraps it around his hip as his movement becomes faster. I hold onto the metal frame of the bed that is now creaking and moving with each thrust.

"You feel so good, Blair," he says as he catches a nipple in his mouth and sucks hard, pushing me closer to the edge.

"Oh god, sir, I'm so close."

"When you come for me I want you to scream my name, Princess."

No one else is in the dorms, everyone is still at P.T. so if I did scream no one would hear me. He licks two of his fingers and starts rubbing my clit, and when he sucks my other nipple into his mouth, I spiral.

"*Oh Jake!*" I scream. My body trembling with pleasure. I swear I'm blinded for a minute. No man has ever pleased

me this way. I clench my inner walls against him, and I hear a growl escape his mouth. He takes his hand away, lowers onto my body, resting on his forearms.

"I need to feel you against me," he says. I wrap my arms around his shoulders and both legs around his waist. Our bodies push against each other as he pushes slow and hard into me. I can feel the tension building up again. I have never had two orgasms within such a short time frame. He kisses me hard and thrusts in a few more times before we both exploded. Our lips crash hard against each other. My body is overwhelmed from my orgasms. I don't want to live without this in my life.

"Damn, Princess," he says into my neck and breathing heavy, "I knew we had chemistry, but I didn't know it would feel so good." I let out a little giggle and he looks down at me, propped up on his hands.

"What's so funny?"

"I don't know. I'm a little overwhelmed, I guess. You're everything I never asked for."

He slides out of me and leans back on his heels. I whimper as the heat from his body leaves.

"You know," he looks over at the clock, "P.T. is going to be over in ten minutes."

"I suppose we have to get back to reality" I say, pouting.

He leans over me and kisses my nose.

"As much as I would love to lay here and fuck you all day, I have a flight to take care of."

He gets off the bed, grabs his clothes, and goes to trash the condom in his office. I put my clothes and shoes on quickly. I go to the bathroom to redo my ponytail and once I look at myself in the mirror I smile. My smile seems new, or at least it was one I hadn't seen on my face in a long time. I stand there for a minute after I fixed my hair, staring. Who is the woman I have become since being here? Jake is healing my heart, and I didn't even know it needed to be mended.

As if he knew I was thinking about him, he strides up behind me and wraps his arms around my hips, resting his chin on my shoulder.

“What are you thinking about?” he asks

“I was thinking about how I haven’t seen this girl who’s looking back at me in a long time. She’s happy, she knows who she is, she knows her purpose, and she’s falling for an amazing man.”

He kisses my cheek. “And he’s falling for her.”

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN



BLAIR

The weekends are definitely my favorite time of the week now because I get to call home. I'm excited. We have two weeks left and I can't wait to find out when my mom and the girls are coming and what they want to do for family day. My mom hasn't been to Texas, so I am excited to show her a couple things the T.I.'s have said are popular in the San Antonio area.

"Hello?"

"Hi Mama!"

"Oh, hello, honey. How are you?"

"I'm doing great. How are the girls?"

"They are adjusting great. They love the daycare they're going to and have made a few friends with the neighbor kids. We took them out for ice cream last night and Avery got so excited at the chance to have more than one flavor on her cone." She laughs, and I smile big. I can't wait to see my girls.

"That's so cute. Avery loves her ice cream, for sure."

We both laugh and it's silent for a second. I don't want to bring up John and I'm sure if there was an issue, she would tell me. So, everything must be running smoothly on her end. I know this has been a lot for her, taking in my two kids with no warning, and she will never know how much I love and appreciate her for it.

"So, in two weeks, I'm done. Next week is warrior week and I'm pretty excited about it. Then graduation will be the following week on Friday. What day do you think you will be able to make it?"

She's silent again and my stomach sinks. I know she had planned on coming, but it was going to be only her here.

"Mom?"

"Honey, I hate I have to tell you this, but there is no way I am going to be able to make the trip. I have already taken to many days off for the girls. And I also had only planned on it for myself, so the cost is a bunch more to fly us all down there. I am so sorry honey; I know that's not the news you wanted to hear. I wish there was something I could do"

Sadness floods me. If it's not one thing, it's another. Will I ever get a break?

"No, Mom, it's okay. I understand. There will be other girls here who already said anyone who doesn't have family can hang out with them." Total lie. "Don't feel bad, Mom, it's okay. I'm a big girl and I know it's not forever and I will see you and the girls again soon enough." I silently sink lower against the phone booth wall. My heart hurts in my chest.

"Okay honey. I am so proud of you. You must know that. You are sacrificing so much for your family."

"Thank you, Mama," I say, trying hard not to cry.

"Okay, well, the girls are getting ready for baths so I will talk to you soon, okay?"

"Yeah, of course. Give the girls a hug from me and tell them I love them."

"Will do. Now you finish strong. I love you."

"I love you too."

I hang up the phone and swallow down the lump in my throat, threatening to make me cry. Once again, I'm the last one at the phones. I turn and put my forehead against the plastic wall and try to calm my breathing.

I hear footsteps approaching. I would know the sound of his boots on concrete anywhere.

"What happened, Princess?" Sergeant Brigham asks as he comes up behind me and puts his hand on my shoulder. The warmth of his touch makes me take a heavy breath in.

"She had only planned on paying for herself. And now with my girls she... she..." I shake my head. "I won't be seeing my girls in two weeks. My strength. My joy. My

girls." I sob. Jake turns me around, cupping my face with his hands.

"I'm sorry, Princess," he says and wraps his arms around me. My hands grab the front of his uniform. When he holds me, it feels safe. His scent is something I never want to forget. My anxiety is ripping my chest open, and I can't help but let it all out. I cry hard into his chest.

"Shhh," he says as he holds me and runs his fingers through my hair to calm my nerves. I take some deep breaths and finally calm down after what feels like an hour of crying. My head is pounding, and I can feel my eyes getting swollen. I let go of his uniform top and wrap my arms around his waist. Our bodies meeting and I feel even safer.

"I'm sorry, Blair. I'm not sure what to say. I know how much you miss your girls and were looking forward to seeing them."

He leans back a little, putting one hand on my hip and the other on my chin, tipping it to look up at him.

"Maybe after everyone else has left with their families, I can take you somewhere. You and me, where no one will see us,"

"I would like that," I say with a slight smile on my face.

"Good. I know of a lake right outside of San Antonio we can go to. Canyon Lake. I've been there a couple times with some friends. We can stop and get you a bathing suit on the way."

"But don't you have to be here for all the parents?"

"Meh, I'll let the other T.I.'s know I have things to take care of. They will hold my spot. I honestly don't care about meeting all those parents, anyway. I would much rather see you happy," he says as he rubs his thumb across my bottom lip.

"Thank you," I say, and he leans down and kisses me. I lift onto my toes and wrap my arms around his neck. He holds me up in his arms. His tongue skirts along my lips and

I open for him. Our tongues as one, tasting each other and exploring.

I pull my head back and look at him. Back and forth from eye to eye and I can see the lust he has for me and I can feel the love I'm starting to have for him.

"We should go back inside," he says as he kisses my cheek softly.

"Yeah, you're probably right. But I want to stay in your arms" I say and kiss his cheek, the stubble on his face pressing into my lips.

"Let's go," he says and releases me.

WEEK

*five*

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

JAKE

**W**arrior Week... ahhh my favorite week. This week shows who can push through to the end. I know Blair is going to kill it. She's become one of the strongest ladies in my flights.

*\*Bang Bang Bang\**

I slam my fist on the door a few minutes before "Reveille" plays. I look in through the small window and see one girl fall out of bed as she rushes quickly to get to the door. I can't help but laugh a little.

"Good morning, ladies! I presume you all had a good night's sleep? Yeah, I don't care, don't answer."

They all scramble as they grab their uniforms and head for the restroom.

"Young!" Fuck me she's only wearing a skintight tank top and her P.T. shorts hiked up, her ass is almost visible under the hem.

"Come get me once everyone's dressed and ready for chow." No one questions why I have her take the lead. She is like a little mother hen to most of these girls. I see her doing their hair and making sure everyone is doing okay. Pulling girls aside and talking to them to make them feel better.

"Yes, sir," she says with a slight smirk on her face.

I go to my office to give them some privacy. My penis twitches to life after I get in there and I shove the thought of her aside, this is not the time. I go over our schedule one more time and shut down my computer. I can't help but stare at the chair in front of me, remembering how it felt when she kissed me and fucked my hand.

*\*knock, knock\**

"Come in, Young."

"Hi, sir." She licks and pulls her bottom lip in and it does things to me.

"Is everyone ready to eat?"

"Yes, sir."

There is something in her eyes I have seen before.

"Is something on your mind, Young?"

She leans into my office a little more and almost shuts the door.

"I was thinking, it's too bad I can't give you something better to eat rather than chow hall food."

She winks and leaves, shutting the door behind her.

I shake my head. This girl does something to me and I am not complaining.

I go back out and the flight is lined up ready to go.

"Young, get them down to chow. I'll join you in a bit."

"Yes, sir," she says and opens the door, holding it as the flight heads out. Once they are out, she looks over at me. She has the sweetest smile, and I can't wait to have those soft lips against mine again, I blow her a kiss and her smile grows a little bigger before she turns to leave letting the door slam shut behind her.

I go back into my office and fire up my computer. I haven't checked the status of my cross training in a couple weeks. I don't really have a direct supervisor that I see daily, so no one else would have been able to tell me if I had a change in status.

Blair has really crashed into my life. I know I said I was ready for a change, but I am not sure this is the kind of change I was expecting. I sign into my computer and click on the link that takes me to all my personal information.

*\*Knock knock knock\**

"Yeah, what? Who's there?" That came out little more hostile than I wanted it to.

The door clicks open and Young pops her head in.

"Hi, sir. Sorry, but sergeant Brookes sent me back up and told me to tell you to stop ghosting him at the Snake



Pit." She laughs and rolls her eyes.

"I swear he is more needy than all you trainees put together." I glance at my screen and see that my cross training has been approved.

"Come in for a minute, Young."

She takes a seat on the chair...that chair.

"Are you doing okay?"

"I think so. I am trying to not think of everything and just concentrate on enjoying warrior week."

"I think it will be good. No one will be able to contact you while we are out there. You will really get to push yourself to your limits."

"I am excited for the obstacle course. I've always wanted to do one, but those aren't really something you just come across in Montana. If I want to take a hike or ride a horse, I can do that all day long." She chuckles and relaxes back in the chair.

I love that she comfortable around me. It still astonishes me that her...husband? Do I call him that? That he left his family. What kind of cold-hearted ignorant ass human do you have to be to do something like that?

"I've never been horseback riding."

"What! Really? It's so much fun. My aunt has horses. We used to visit all the time when I was a teenager. My cousins and I would saddle up and be gone all day exploring the twenty acres of land they lived on."

"Sounds like fun."

"It really is. You should try it and we can go explore together—" She stumbles over that last word. Her head now hanging low.

I stand, circle my desk and bend down to look at her face.

"I'm sorry," she says "I'm not assuming anything is going to come of this. I just got excited for a second"

I grab her chin and tilt her head up slightly so I can look her in the eyes. She looks at me through her lashes and I

can see the frown that has formed on her face. I don't want to be another disappointment in her life.

"Princess, I wish I could change the world for you. If I could follow you around it, I honestly think I would."

She lifts her head the rest of the way and pulls her bottom lip between her teeth. I put my thumb below it and pull it out.

"Don't stress, Blair," I say softly. "I know that's why you bite your lip."

"Why couldn't you have come into my life four years ago, when I needed you?"

"I'm not so sure that is when you needed me. I think everything happens for a reason, and we found each other when we both required it the most"

She stands and wraps her arms around my waist, resting her head on my chest. I wrap my arms around her also and kiss the top of her head.

"Thank you," she says

"No thanks needed, Princess."

She steps back out my hold and goes for the door.

"I'll tell Sergeant Brookes to stop whining." She laughs looking back at me "That won't get me put on my face I'm sure," she says sarcastically.

I laugh. "Tell him I'll be down in five."

"Okay," she says, walking out the door and leaving it open just enough for me to watch her walk away. Something I don't want to watch her do from me anymore. But the Air Force controls my life, so my choices aren't my own.

I sit back down in my chair and get back to what I was looking at. The website says my cross training got approved. I scroll down to where my new orders are. The page loads and I can't believe what I'm seeing.

"Holy shit!"

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

BLAIR

**A**fter breakfast we grab our bags and head to the bus that will take us out to the middle of nowhere.

"Alphabetical order ladies. We have to account for everyone." One of the T.I.'s yells from the front of the buses.

Ugh! Last in line. I hate my last name sometimes. We load onto the bus and I can see Brigham watching me in between marking each girl off as they get onto the bus. I wonder if he is riding with us.

I get on last, and luckily, I get a seat to myself right behind the bus driver. If he doesn't ride with us, maybe I can get a nap in. From here the bus driver can't even see me. Several minutes later Sergeant Brigham stands at the front of the bus. He has the biggest smile on his face, and I can't help but smile back.

"Ladies, this week is going to be fun! Are you ready?"

*Yeah! Yes! Wooooo!* Everyone yells, is pumped and ready to start this week. He turns and pats the bus driver on the shoulder.

"Let's get going!"

And right when I think he is going to step off the bus, the driver shuts the doors and Brigham takes a seat in the one adjacent to me. I turn and look out the window, knowing if I look at him for much longer it will take all my willpower to not launch myself across the bus.

A half hour later I decide to turn around and see he has put his bag behind him on the seat and he is slouched down against it. His head barely reaching the tops of the seats. His eyes shut. He looks so peaceful compared to the angry, yelling man I'm used to.

As if he knows I'm watching, he opens his eyes and catches me. I can feel his beautiful green eyes all over me and it makes an ache start between my legs. I smile and

shimmy down in my seat to relax back, angling my body towards him.



JAKE

The fire in her eyes right now has me fixed on her. She angles her body toward me and starts running her hand up her thigh, over her belly, slowing at her breast as she squeezes slightly. She has her finger at her mouth as she bites the tips of two and then takes them into her mouth and sucks as she pulls them in and out. While her other hand is unbuttoning her top. My dick instantly stirs to life and I have to adjust.

Thankfully, how she's seated, I am the only one who can see into her seat. She is set right behind the driver and the black divider keeps him from being able to see her in his mirror.

Once her top is undone, she reaches down, undoes her belt and pops open each button. Her hand goes to her breast under her shirt showing her ivory stomach and her wet fingers find their way down into her pants. I can see a hint of red panties as she pumps her fingers slowly into her body. Her body is carefully moving against her hand to get all the friction she needs. She catches my eyes with hers and I reach down to push against my erection.

I can see the orgasm building in her. Her body squirming so slightly. She bites her bottom lip and watches me as I mouth the words, "Come for me, Princess," and she does. Her eyes slam shut, and her entire body tightens up. She squeezes her lips together, so she doesn't let a sound past her mouth. When she gains control again, she pulls her hand out of her pants and brings the two fingers she used to her mouth, sucking them clean. And my dick is on high alert. That might have been the hottest thing I've ever seen. She buttons everything back up, gives me a smile and closes her eyes to sleep the rest of the way.

This really is going to be my favorite week.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BLAIR

The brakes screech to a halt and I jolt awake. That was the best car nap I have ever had, I'm sure it had something to do with the release of tension. I look over at Jake and he smiles before gathering his things and standing.

"Ladies, first we are going to head over to the tarmac and get some ground rules laid out. Then we will go back for your belongings and head to your home for the next week. Let's go."

We shuffle out and march over in two lines. He ushers us into the bleachers, and we sit watching all the other troops file in. Sam leans over. "I am not looking forward to this. Marching around and P.T. is easy. I have a feeling this is going to be ten times harder."

"Yeah, I have a feeling it is too, but we will try to stick together."

*"Attention! Attention!"* a tall thin T.I. yells from the center of the tarmac. "Welcome to your fun week of hell! Each day will be something new and exciting. This is your chance to push yourself to the limit, see what you're made of and if you belong with these men and women who put their lives on the line," he says reaching out his arms encompassing all the other T.I.'s down there.

"Here is how the week will proceed:

Monday—M16 Training

Tuesday—Gas chamber

Wednesday—M16 Obstacle course

Thursday—Camp invasion

Friday—Award ceremony

Saturday—Hike around base

Sunday—Travel home



"This week will run as smooth as you make it. We will eat here for all meals, and they will be comprised of MRE's, which also means you probably won't shit right for a week afterwards. Have fun with that."

We all kind of look at each other with disgust on our face. Could they really be that bad? Guess we will find out tonight.

"T.I.'s please gather your troop and head to your tents."

Tents? Great, it's a thousand degrees out here and I'm guessing inside the tents will be muggy as hell. We fall in line behind Jake, me at the rear which is rare but at least I'm not directly behind him breathing in his scent and losing my mind. We march for about ten minutes and then we round a corner coming to the end of a road with one tent. One long, old tent. I notice woods surround us and the closest building is the restrooms we passed a couple minutes ago. We make our way to the tent and head inside. Jake is standing at the first bed to the left when I walk in.

"Dorm mom, you get first bed. I expect you to keep everything in order. For the rest of you, empty your crap into the locker at the end of your bed."

I look down at my locker and notice the floor is dirt, there is one giant fan at the end of the tent that is hardly blowing the air around but at least we all have our own bed I suppose. I unload my stuff but keep Jake in the corner of my eye. He's seriously so hot, I wonder if he is sleeping in a tent also? Or do the T.I.'s get cabins with air conditioning, I'm sure they do.

When everyone's done and has taken a seat on their bed Jake continues, "There will be guard duty. Your dorm mom will make the schedule, but she also has to take a shift tonight."

I roll my eyes at him but am also so glad I took a nap on the bus. "They are three-hour time slots, nine to twelve, twelve to three and three to six. I don't care who works what shift as long as no one falls asleep."

The rest of the evening is pretty boring. We check out the bathrooms, walk by the obstacle course, M16 range, and the gas chamber. Then make our way back to the tarmac where other trainees are passing out MRE's. We each grab one and head to our spot on the bleachers. The MRE's are a complete meal, including something to drink that isn't water. My meal is spaghetti. It comes with packets to heat it up and utensils. I get started on preparing my meal when Sam creeps over and plops down next to me.

"What did you get?" she asks with a disgusted look on her face.

"Spaghetti. It doesn't look so bad," I say, smiling at her.

"I got chili... I hate chili." she says with a slight annoyed chuckle.

"I'm sorry, do you want to switch?" I ask her. It's not my favorite, but I don't mind.

"Oh, my god, seriously?"

I nod my head and her smile grows bigger. I switch main meals with her and lean in close so I can whisper without the other ladies hearing me.

"What kind of dorm mom would I be if I let you eat something nasty. Just don't tell the rest of them."

She laughs and winks at me.

We finish eating, get up and file out of the bleachers. We toss our trash and head back to the tent. After everyone's inside, I get their attention to let them know tonight's guard schedule.

"Kristy and Katherine, you have the nine to twelve. Sam and I will have the twelve to three and Claire and Melissa will have the three to six."

The rest of the evening is uneventful. We showered, which I suppose was one of the most flustered situations I have ever witnessed. Five troops of thirty girls each filing in and out, trying to keep their towel, bathroom gear and flip-flops all together. Then trying to walk in the dirt while still wet and not get your toes muddy. At lights out, Kristy and

Katherine position themselves outside in the two metal chairs on either side of the tent door.

"Be sure to wake us up fifteen minutes before shift change so we have time to get our shoes on and such," I tell them and walk back inside zipping the tent up behind me. Its dark and the tent has no internal lighting, so I slowly walk to my bed, being thankful I am the first one. I lay down and drift off to sleep quickly.

"Dorm mom, dorm mom," I hear Katherine saying as she nudges my shoulder.

"What? Oh, yeah. Fuck, I'm up." I sit up quickly because I know if I don't, I will fall right back to sleep. I reach for my shorts I had taken off and stuffed together with my socks at the end of my bed. I hate sleeping in anything but a T-shirt and tonight I was over it. I put them on quickly and tie on my sneakers. Sam was already up and outside. "Good night you two," I whispered to them as they made their way to their beds.

Outside, Sam looks over at me, and I can tell she is already struggling. I give her a somber look and then look away.

"This blows," she whispers and slouches down in her chair.

"Go to sleep, Sam, if I hear anyone, I'll wake you up." And she does just that. I'm too freaked out with the woods surrounding us to even think about sleeping. I don't watch horror movies, because of occasions like this. Not that I ever thought I would be in this position, but still.

An hour later and Sam is snoring softly with her head leaned against the canvas tent. Crunching of leaves gets my attention and I sit of straight and stiff. That's it, this is how I am going to die. I knew it. I'm not made for this, maybe I will leave. I look back and forth but don't turn my head enough to look behind the tent into the woods. I'm sure it's an animal, I tell myself, a cute little bunny or something. They are nocturnal, right? No, ugh!

"Sam!" I say in a whisper yell, "Sam, seriously!" But she doesn't even flinch.

Suddenly a hand wraps around my mouth from behind and fiery breath lands on my ear. My eyes shoot open, and I struggle, trying to push off my chair and get away.

"Shhh, Princess, don't wake your partner in crime there." I let out a huge breath of relief. And Jake moves his hand from my mouth. I turn to look at him and scowl.

"What the hell? You scared the shit out of me!" I whisper yell at him.

He chuckles a little and leans in close to my face. "How else am I supposed to make sure your guard is up? Which obviously it isn't, and your friend there, sucks at her job. We should probably wake her up"

I look over to Sam and smile, "But she looks so peaceful. I don't want to wake her."

He grabs my hand and lifts me to him. "I wasn't planning on it. Come with me."

He leads me to the back of the tent. "Where are we going?" I ask, but he doesn't answer. He keeps walking, pulling me behind him, and we go straight into the woods.

"Are you serious, I hate the woods. What about wild animals?"

He stops and turns to me. By this time, we have made it pretty far in and I can barely see the tent through the thick trees.

He pulls me against his body and his lips brush mine. "Princess, I am the only wild animal you should be worried about." He picks me up and launches me over his shoulder, and I let out a laugh. He walks a few more seconds and sets me down.

He walks towards me, backing me into a tree and pushes his powerful body into mine. I can feel the bark digging into my skin, but I don't care.

"I haven't been able to stop thinking about you on the bus today. You had your fun. It's my turn." He says and

kisses me hard, his hands grabbing my ass and lifting me up slightly. He lowers his kisses to my neck and along my shirt hem.

"And what exactly do you have planned?" I ask, my breathing getting heavy and heat growing between my legs.

"Less talking," he says and lifts my shirt over my head. "Take your shoes off."

So, I do as he says and toe each one off, leaving my socks on and push them to the side. He pulls my shorts and panties down and I step out of them. His mouth finds my thigh and he slowly kisses and nibbles his way to my pussy. He grabs my knees and hitches one leg over his shoulder, and I hang onto the tree for balance. He licks me slow, his tongue wide against my clit, covering the whole surface.

"Oh, god," I say, out of breath and reaching for his hair, pulling hard. We have fucked, but his mouth is a different story.

He nibbles and sucks my clit into his mouth, making my body shudder. I'm so close to my orgasm. "Don't stop, Jake, please don't stop!" I breathe heavy.

But he does, and the sensation of his warm mouth leaving my clit has my body bowing towards him. He moves my leg off his shoulder and stands, takes off his ABU top and wraps it around my back and I put my arms through. "I don't want the tree to hurt you," he says.

He takes his shirt off and undoes his belt and pants. My hands find his chest and I can't help but bring my mouth to him and lick up the length of his perfectly sculpted abs. Licking and nipping each of his nipples while I make my way up to his neck. He sucks in a deep breath and grabs my shoulders, letting his pants fall. He looks at me with want and desire in his eyes. He moves his hands to my hips and lifts me, my legs instantly wrapping around his waist.

"Hang on," he says and dips his head down to my breast and sucks in a nipple. He trails kisses up my chest to my lips

and presses hard. I can taste myself on his lips, and it only makes my need for him more intense.

He grabs his dick and slowly rubs the head of it back and forth along my clit, making sure every inch of me is wet and ready. He lowers me onto him, and I bury my face in his neck, wrapping one arm around his head and the other hanging on to his shoulder.

"Jake... ah..." I can't even talk. He feels so amazing.

"You don't have to say a word," he says and starts pumping into me faster. He finds my lips and kisses me hard, his tongue in and all around. Biting my lower lip and sucking it in. He shifts slightly and his dick goes deeper. Filling me like I've never felt before.

"Oh fuck, right there, oh god, don't stop," I say feeling like I can't get enough of him in and on me. He keeps his rhythm, one hand on my ass, the other above my shoulder on the tree keeping us balanced.

His breathing kicks up and I can tell he's close. I dig my nails into his back and bite down on his shoulder, and we both come at the same time. The feeling is unreal. My pussy tightens and I can feel his dick throbbing. He slows down a little but still holds me against him hard, making my orgasm last even longer. I whimper in pleasure and he pumps a few more times before he stops. He lifts his head, and our eyes meet. His hands move from the tree to the side of my face. I smile slightly and lean into it. His mouth opens and then shuts.

"What is it? What's wrong?" I say, my eyebrows coming together and worry seeping in.

"I just..." he says, bringing me in for a kiss. He pulls away slightly, our foreheads still touching.

"I don't know how I am going to let you go."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

JAKE

I take her back to her guard spot at the tent, thankful she still has forty-five minutes left, and the other trainee was still asleep. I kiss her one last time and take off in the opposite direction through the woods. The T.I.'s cabins are on the other side, so it's not a far walk. These woods will never be the same.

I have to make the most of the next two weeks. I don't want to let her go, but I know she will leave, and I will have to stay behind. I don't have a choice at the moment. This has been so amazing, but it feels destined for disaster. I don't deserve her, anyway.

"Where the hell have you been?" Jeremy asks as I walk through the door of our cabin.

"One of my trainees fell asleep on guard duty. Had to give her hell for it."

"Ah yes, the first night is the most fun."

He does not know. But this week, I have a feeling, will probably be more than satisfying. This week she's going to show me how strong she is, how well she deals with mental and physical pain, how sexy she is covered in mud and holding a rifle. I am ready to steal as many moments as I can with her this week. It should be easier here, with lots of woods to hide in. I want her to know she is amazing, she is worthy, she deserves exactly what she wants. And I kind of hope I am one of those wants.

The thought makes my chest hurt. She wasn't supposed to be. This wasn't supposed to happen. None of it. But she came out of nowhere and knocked me on my ass. I want to be the one who sees her succeed; I want to be the one who she goes to when she's sad and needs to be held. I think I'm falling in love with her. But I can't. I must put these feelings aside; they need to shut up and hide away. This can be fun



for the rest of our time here, but then she leaves, and I stay. After that, who knows where she will move, who she will meet. She has to be the one who gets away. I have to accept she's building a new foundation, and I am a bridge to help get to the woman she is becoming.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

BLAIR

The gas chamber was the hardest part of this week. I honestly thought the obstacle course would be my biggest challenge because I've never been physically fit, but I came in second place! But the chamber, man, it sucked. We filed in with our gas masks on. Once inside, a group of T.I.'s told us to take our masks off and repeat the pledge. This way they made sure we were breathing in the fumes. But I could feel the effects of it before I even opened my mouth. It stung my face and then when I open my mouth, took a breath, and started talking, it felt like fire ants marching down my throat. Once I got outside, every hole in my face was leaking, it was disgusting. Nothing made the burning subside and I think the water I splashed on my face might have made it worse. I can only hope to never be in that position in real life.

Shooting the M16 was exciting. Each person had their own opening to be in, with walls on either side, so we didn't get distracted by each other. But I had not shot before, so my aim was horrible at first. Jake had to show me the proper way to rifle. Of course, his way of showing me was wrapping his arms around me from behind and grinding his dick into my ass. We had to shoot standing up and laying on our bellies. I was sure to push my ass up and wiggle it a bit when I knew he was behind me.

It's the last day and we are on our hike around base. I'm of course at the front, behind Jake, getting a whiff of his scent occasionally which makes my thighs tremble. The hike's relaxing. We didn't have to march, and we could walk at our own pace as long as we didn't fall far behind. But with my view, I wasn't going to fall far from that behind.

"Help!" someone screams.

We all stop to turn around. Someone passed out. It's not crazy hot, and we weren't exerting much energy, so I am not sure what happened. Jake and I both run toward her and bend down at her side. It's Carter. She's breathing, but she's out of it. Jake looks over to me and hands me his walkie talkie.

"Call for medic. Tell them we are at the east corner, and a trainee has passed out from over-hydration."

"Yes, sir." I say and stand to walk slightly away from the chatter and call over the walkie for a medic.

Over-hydrate? I didn't even know you could over-hydrate.

"They said they aren't far, a couple minutes away." I kneel back down next to her. "I didn't even know you could over-hydrate!" I say confused and worried, "Why isn't she waking up?"

Jake lowers his head and whispers, "It's possible she could have slipped into a coma. It's also possible she had a small seizure. She needs medical attention ASAP."

I take in a deep breath. One hand presses to my mouth and the other to the girl's shoulder. Worry grips my chest. This is real. This entire experience has felt planned. Everything happens in an orderly way and nothing ever gets in the way. But this, this isn't planned, this is real life.

The medic shows up in no time. They get her onto a stretcher and load her onto the UTV.

"We have it from here, we will keep you updated on her status," the medic says to Jake.

"Okay, thank you," he says and heads back to the front of the flight.

The rest of the hike is silent. We are all in shock and not sure what to say to each other. We get back to our tent and Jake tells us to shower and pack. We are going to leave early tomorrow.

The atmosphere is stressful. Half the girls decide to shower, and the rest lay in bed for a few minutes before

packing.

"Do you think she will be okay?" I hear one of them ask

"I don't know. I hope so," I hear another say.

"I didn't even realize over-hydrating was a thing. They make it seem like we are going to be dehydrated and push drinking water so hard. I wonder how much is too much?" Sam says.

"I'm not sure, but I suppose whatever you all are doing now is fine since you aren't in the same situation. But if you start feeling weird, please tell me. Hopefully, this doesn't happen again, and we can avoid it," I say to reassure them all.

Sleeping tonight is going to be hard, worrying about Carter is at the front of my brain. These girls have become like family to me and if one of them is hurting, I'm hurting. I guess it's the mom in me.



WE DIDN'T HAVE to do guard duty last night, so I didn't get my nightly visit from Jake and my body didn't feel like it needed a lot of sleep. I woke up a half hour before "Reveille" and decide to sit outside the tent to enjoy the sunrise.

"Good Morning, Princess," I hear Jake say as he comes up from behind me and gives me a soft kiss on the cheek then wraps his arms around me from behind in a sensual hug. I rub my hand against the back of his head and enjoy his warmth first thing in the morning.

"Any word on Carter?" I ask.

"She was life flighted to San Antonio."

"Oh god, I hope she's okay."

"Yeah, me too. She's still young, so her body has a lot of fight left in her. I'm sure she will make a full recovery," he says in a calm and reassuring way.

I stand to be in front of him. He pulls me in and puts his chin on my head.

"You ready to get back to the dorms and your last week at basic?"

"Yes," I say with a sigh of relief, "I am so over sleeping on a cot in a tent with a dirt floor. This is roughing it for me."

He laughs and looks at me. He rubs his thumb along my cheek. I love the way he does that, it's such a small gesture, but it always makes me smile.

"Well, Princess, let's wake up the crazies so we can get back and you can have your four-inch mattress and cold tiled floors back."

"That sounds like heaven right now." I push up onto my toes and kiss him quick, "Let's go."

Once everyone is up and loaded onto the bus, Jake gets on the bus and stands at the front.

"This was a great week. You all showed how strong you can be and how much drive you have to be great. Enjoy the ride home. You can have the rest of the weekend to yourself. Young, I expect you to get everyone to and from chow, make sure chores get done, and lights out are on time. I will see you all bright and early Monday morning."

"Yes, sir!" we all shout in unison.

He turns and steps off the bus without another look. I watch him as he crawls into the back of a green Jeep. He must be riding back with the other T.I.'s. That's probably for the best considering it's hard being so close, yet so far away from him. Smelling his scent and seeing him, but not being able to climb in his lap and touch him is the worst feeling.

The rest of the weekend is so relaxed. We have a lot of great conversations. We laughed, we cried, and I braided a lot of hair. Even though I am so ready to leave this place, I will miss the new family I now love.

WEEK

*six*

## CHAPTER TWENTY



BLAIR

“Reveille” plays over the loudspeaker and I’m ready to start this day. Warrior week was fun, in more ways than one, but this is the last week. It will be filled with parade practice and we should also get our base assignments. Most of us know where we are going because we picked out jobs before we came, but we get the official word this week.

“Good morning, girls.”

That’s not Jake. It’s definitely the T.I. from our first night here, I wouldn’t forget a voice.

“Get up, get dressed, and meet me in the common room. I have your tech school assignments.”

We all were up and dressed as fast as possible and ready for the news. I already know I’m staying in Texas, but there are a few girls who came in as “general” and do not know what job they were getting or where their tech school would be.

“Everyone sit down, sit down. All right, when I call your name come up and get your assignment.”

After she calls my name and I sit back down, I look down at the paper.

Sheppard AFB in Sheppard, Texas.

This will be my new home for the next six weeks. I picked a job with the shortest tech school. I didn’t care what it was, all I cared was how long it was going to keep me away from my girls and now that I know I won’t be seeing them at the end of this week, I’m extra glad I made that decision.

“Blair, where are you going?” Sam asks as she looks over my shoulder at my paper.

“Sheppard, you?”

“Same!” she squeals and hugs me. “I’m so glad I will know someone; we can hang out every weekend! Wouldn’t

it be outstanding if we got the same dorm too?"

"Yeah, that would be nice. I'm glad we are going to the same place. I won't feel so alone."

"All right, mama bear, don't get all sappy on me," she says, and she hugs me again.

I have met some amazing women while being here. All with different stories and reasons for joining.

"Okay, well," the female T.I. says as she stands up, "it looks like I will be in charge of you ladies for this last week. I'm not sure what happened with your other T.I. and why he can't finish his week out, so don't ask. It's not my first choice either, so we will have to get along."

We all look around at each other with confusion on our faces. I feel gutted. I feel like crying. Why would he disappear the last week? Why am I assuming there would be something beyond these five weeks? I'm so stupid for thinking this would be anything more than some fling, but the way he holds me, kisses me, looks at me, I thought there was something more.

I gather my thoughts and emotions and get a hold of myself. Don't be silly. Even if there was something, this is where he's stationed, and I'm about to be hours away at another base with no way of leaving.

The rest of the day is a blur. We spend our morning doing PT and eating breakfast. Then we go over to the parade grounds and get our flags assigned to us that we will need to carry during the parade. I'm the only one in our flight from Montana, so I was the obvious choice to carry its state flag.

After trying out the harnesses, we head back to the dorms for lunch. The chow hall is calm. They let us take our time in line and get exactly what we want. There's no snake pit to worry about, and we can take our time eating and even get to talk to each other.

The rest of the day is boring. We sit around the dorm doing whatever we want because our T.I. didn't have

anything else for us, and she didn't feel like dealing with us. She must deal with male flights.

Lying in bed, I can't help but think of Jake. In the woods, when he told me he didn't know how he could let me go after this week. Breaking all the rules for me. And now what? Nothing? Is he going to act like nothing happened, like there weren't feelings there?

The more I think about it, the more upset I become. And it's no longer so much anger as it is disappointment. Hoping again a man would be there for me when I needed him the most.

Ghosted, that's what I've been. I've been frickin ghosted. And even if I want to find out what happened and why he vanished, I can't without revealing what was happening between us.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

BLAIR

This week has been emotionally draining for me. I am ready for it to be over, but I was also hoping to say goodbye to Jake.

Day in and day out, we march to the parade grounds to practice. We practice marching, holding flags, best ways to not pass out cause it's like the devil's asshole outside and we are standing directly in the sun for at least two hours. I'm over it. I'm hot and I'm irritated. A goodbye, is that too much to ask?

After our wonderful day of practicing, our brother flights T.I. enters the dorm.

"Common room, now, ladies."

"Not the T.I. I was hoping for," I mumble as I walk past him. Fairly sure he heard me, but at this point I don't care.

"This is your last mail call and then the evening is yours. We will open the closet in the morning so you can get your luggage and pack before the festivities."

Mail call, it's gotten better. My mom sends me a colored picture from both of my girls. And I have written them at least every other day. When the T.I. calls my name, I am surprised he has two letters in his hand. The one on top is from my mom and the second, I am not sure because there is no return address.

I open the one from my girls first. A picture of them, together, in dress up that's five times too big. They are being sassy with their hips out and their hands on them. I can't wait to hug them again. Tears threaten because I know tomorrow, I won't see them. My mom never found a way to make it down, which I understand. My girls were dropped into her lap unexpectedly.

I put the picture back in the envelope and pull the note out. It's from my mom...

*BLAIR,*

*The girls are doing amazing. Their daycare teacher says they are the sweetest and so polite. They are learning so much from being there. And I know they miss you dearly. I am sorry again I couldn't figure out a way to get down there for your graduation and I know you say you understand but I feel bad. Maybe you can have visitors in tech school, and I will plan something. I am so proud of the strong woman you have become. Your girls are proud of you too. They know mommy is away to give them only the best. Good luck at your graduation and call me as soon as you can. I love you.*

*Mom*

I HOLD the letter to my chest and let a single tear roll down. I miss them so much.

I fold the letter and put back in the envelope with the picture and set it aside. I open the next one and am in shock. It's from John.

*BLAIR,*

*I know leaving may have not been the best answer, but I am not made to do this. I don't know if I was ever meant to be a dad or husband. I mean, maybe I could try again. Maybe we could try counseling. Would you like that? So, we can be a family again? I miss you and the girls. Being back home has been great. All my friends welcomed me back with open arms and no judgement. Maybe after your time in the service you could come back here. We could come back here. Anyway, I thought I would write something, I don't know. Hit me up once you're out and we can talk.*

*John*

WHAT IN THE actual fuck did I just read? Are you kidding me? Not the best answer? No, it wasn't the best answer; it wasn't the right answer at all!

Try again? Ha! Is he serious? I wouldn't try again; I would rather do this alone than with him anywhere close.

Family again? I can't roll my eyes hard enough. What a fucking joke! I can't believe this man had the audacity to write this bullshit on paper and pay for a stamp. He can shove his "missing us" and "try again" right up his ass and sit on it.

I rip up the letter and get up and throw it away. I'm so pissed I'm shaking; I'm getting sweaty, and I want to scream. I walk out of the common room and go to my bed. I slam my face down into the pillow and let it out, pushing the pillow into my face so hopefully no one will hear me scream. To my surprise, everyone heard me. When I look up, the entire flight is standing around me with somber looks on their faces. Sam takes a step forward.

"We know you have had a hard time. Definitely harder than the rest of us. We don't have families to worry about at home like you do. But we wanted to let you know, even though we give you shit, you are the best dorm mom, and we couldn't have asked for a better one. We all love you and are going to miss you something fierce."

Ugly crying, that's what's happening now. All these girls coming to my side when I need them the most and they don't even know it. But, In the back of my mind, there's one person whose shoulder I would rather cry on.

They crowd in on me and we hug. One giant group hug. A hug from my new family. A hug from girls who have appreciated me these past six weeks and aren't ashamed to show it.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



BLAIR

The next morning it really starts hitting me that this is over. The T.I. pulls our luggage from the closet and we all pack. They allow us to have our cell phones now. Well, not me, I didn't bring one. The chatter from everyone calling home is almost too much.

"Do you want to use my phone?" Sam asks.

"If you don't mind, I would love to call my girls!"

"Of course, I don't mind, mama bear."

I roll my eyes and take the phone from her. I dial my mom and she picks up after the first ring.

"Hi, Mom!"

"Oh, Blair, honey. You haven't graduated already, have you? It's so early."

"No mom, we are getting our things packed. We are having lunch first, then getting ready and heading over to the parade grounds."

"Oh okay. Well, your girls are bright eyed and bushy tailed. Would you like to talk to them?"

"I would love to!"

My mom calls them over and puts me on speaker.

"Here they are," she says.

"Hi girls, its Mommy."

"Hi, Mommy!" Kaylee and Avery say at the same time.

"Mommy," Kaylee says, "Grama say your gradidating today?"

"I sure am. And after that I will go to school where hopefully I will get to see you both again."

I hear Avery squeal and Kaylee giggle.

"I can't wait to see you girls again. I am so glad you love your school and that you are being good girls for Grandma."

"Yes, mommy, school is so much fun!" Kaylee says.

“New fwriends!” Says Avery. The tone in her voice is so different from when I talked to her 4 weeks ago. She’s having fun now.

“We love you mommy” Kaylee says, and I get choked up and tears swell my eyes.

“I love you girls so much. I can’t wait to see you again and give you big hugs!”

“Us too!” Avery says with glee in her voice.

“Okay, well mommy has to get ready for her big day ok? I hope you girls have a great weekend with grandma.”

“Thanks, Mommy” Avery says, and I hear her run away giggling.

“Mommy?” Kaylee asks

“Yeah, sweetheart?”

“I am so proud of you, Mommy,” she says. My heart melts and I can no longer hold back my tears.

“Thank you, sweetie. I love you so much!”

“I love you too, Mommy!”

“Okay, now you run along and play with your sister, we will make pancakes for breakfast soon,” I hear my mom say as she clicks the phone off speaker.

“I have to go, Mom; we are about to get our blues ready.” A lie, but I can’t talk anymore. The sounds of their voices and giggles in the background breaks my heart.

“Okay honey, I love you and have a great graduation day.”

“Love you too, Mom.”

I hang up and set the phone next to me. I’m already on my bed so I lay down and pull my legs up into my chest. And for what feels like the millionth time, I cry.

Sam slides in bed behind me and big spoons me. Wrapping her arm around me.

“I know today is going to be a hard day. You can hang out with me and my family if you want?”

I sniffle and wipe my nose on my hand. “Thanks Sam, but I think I’m going to come back here and hang out.”

“Okay, but if you change your mind, you’re always welcome.”

“Thank you.”



A LOT of the girls brought makeup with them. I didn’t even think about makeup, not that it would matter, because the extent of my makeup collection is tinted lip gloss. I couldn’t afford to splurge on such things. Maybe once I get to my next base, I will get myself a few things, I deserve it after all. We have an hour to get our hair, makeup, and dress blues on before heading over to the parade grounds.

Once we are there, my nerves kick in. The stands are overflowing with people. No one will notice me in the sea of trainees. Thankfully, today is the coolest day we have had since being here, which is such a relief. We all get into our formations and stand at ease as the base commander addresses us and the crowd.

“Today you are Airmen. You have successfully completed a six-week course that challenged you mentally, physically, and emotionally. During this time, you have come to be better men and women...”

He goes on and on for what feels like an hour. I couldn’t even tell you half the stuff he said because I think I blanked out. Once we start marching, the rest of the ceremony moves by quickly.

After the parade, we march over to the courtyard. This is going to be the hardest part about today, and I can already feel the tears pricking the back of my eyes.

“Troops! Attention!” We all snap into place.

“You know the rules. You will stay at attention until your family taps you out. At that time, you can enjoy the rest of your day. Be back to the dorms at 2100. You will have an

early morning tomorrow. Congrats Airmen, you are officially done with basic training."

The crowd around us roars and families flood into the flights. I didn't tell anyone except for Sam that my family wouldn't be here. I didn't want their pity but standing here knowing no one is coming for me is heartbreaking and slightly embarrassing. I figure once everyone is mostly gone, the T.I.'s won't be paying attention anymore and I can walk away. I try not to watch as my flight reunites with their families. Their joy is my sadness right now.

I feel my shoulders falling as my body breaks the stance. Tears start as I drop my head and take a step to walk away. Walk away from all the surrounding joy. I want to go back to the dorms and hide in my bed.

I feel a tap on my shoulder from behind and my breath hitches. No one's supposed to be here to tap me out.

"Hey, Princess," he says

My hand goes to my mouth in shock as I turn around to see him. Jake. He's here? Why is he here? Why isn't he in uniform? Where the hell has he been? Why does he have a duffel bag? Wait... is anyone else seeing this? I look around as if I'm seeing a ghost.

He puts his palm on my cheek and rubs his thumb along the corner of my mouth. I grab his forearm, to be sure the heat isn't making me hallucinate.

"I'm sorry I disappeared. But I didn't want to get your hopes up in case something changed. I have been out-processing all week."

"Out-processing? You're leaving?" But the look on his face is not of frustration or disappointment.

"Yeah, Princess," he holds up a piece of paper, "Sheppard Air Force Base."

"What!" I squeal and leap into his arms, hugging him. "I can't believe it. You're going to be with me?" I lean back to look at him, "Well, not with me, with me, but with me like at

the same base?" He nods his head and his smile radiates.  
"Oh, my god, I cannot believe it!"

"As of an hour ago, I am no longer attached to this base in any way." Relief flooding over me. My anger and frustration with him melting away. He kisses my lips softly.

"I put my application in to cross train almost four months ago. It got approved three weeks ago. They told me I wouldn't be getting another flight so I asked if I could out-process early."

My eyes fill with tears and he pulls me to him, brushing his lips over my ear.

"Looks like you were meant to be mine, Princess."

## EPILOGUE

ONE MONTH LATER

“**A**re you ready?” Jake asks me as I hop over the door and slam my butt into the passenger side of his convertible mustang. I love his car.

“I’m beyond ready! The question is, are you?” I ask him. It’s Friday and my mom and girls are fifteen minutes away. We must go to the visitors’ center and sign them in. They are staying for the weekend and I am so excited.

“I think I can handle a couple little girls. If they are anything like their mama, they will think I am pretty exceptional.”

“You know what, you’re right. You *are* pretty exceptional, and I am sure they are going to love you!” I lean over the center console and kiss his cheek as he presses the gas, and we head for the front of the base.

As we pull into the parking lot, my entire body is shaking with excitement. It’s been almost three months since I have seen my girls in person. Since getting to tech school, I was able to buy a phone and video chat with them.

We get out and stand at the back of the car, Jake taking my hand in his and kissing my knuckles. My mom told me she rented a little white car, so now I am anxiously watching every white car that goes through the gates.

Finally, one pulls into the parking lot and I can see the car seats sticking up over the back seats. I look at Jake as my eyes swell with tears, happy tears and I let go of his hand and run over to the car. My mom steps out and I embrace her in a hug.

“Hi, Mama!” I squeeze her tight but only for a few seconds. I love my mom, but I cannot wait to hug my girls. I can hear my girls in the back yelling for me.

I open the back door, and Avery and Kaylee are squealing. I unbuckle Kaylee’s car seat and scoop her into

my arms, while my mom goes around and unbuckles Avery. I fall to my knees and catch my second daughter in my arms.

"I've missed you girls so much."

"We have missed you too, Mommy," Kaylee says.

I release them from my grasp, but only a little. Just enough to see their faces.

"Why crying, Mommy?" Avery asks with a small bit of concern on her face.

"It's happy tears, honey. I am the happiest mommy in the world right now!"

"Yay!" She squeals and wraps her little arms around my neck giving me a kiss on my cheek. My mom kneels to our level and wraps her arms around all of us.

"Mom, I owe you everything," I say to her as I lean my forehead to her cheek. "Thank you for bringing the girls down to see me."

"Of course, honey," she says and stands.

I grab both my girls in my arms and stand. One girl on each hip.

"There's someone I want you girls to meet." I turn towards Jake. His face is red and his eyes are misty. He wipes the wetness from his cheeks and steps forward.

"Girls, this is Jake. He's mommy's friend and has helped her a lot through all these weeks she's been away."

"Hi Kaylee. Hi Avery," he says with a little wave of his fingers.

Kaylee hides her face, but Avery's eyes light up and she reaches her hand out to him. He grabs it and shakes her hand.

"It's very nice to meet you, Avery," Jake says and Avery giggles.

Kaylee lifts her head but says nothing. She has always been the shy one. While Avery is quite the people person.

"Alright girls, let's get you and grandma signed into the base and get settled at your hotel."



I set the girls on their feet and grab one of their little hands in each of mine.

After we get them signed into the base, Jake goes back to his apartment while I head with my mom and the girls to their hotel.

"Jake has dinner planned for us at his apartment," I tell my mom as she zips her luggage after putting all her stuff into the drawers and bathroom of the hotel room.

"Oh, how wonderful, dear. I was hoping to not have to eat fast food again today." She sits on the bed and pats the space next to her. The girls are busy on their bed watching something on the tablet my mom brought for them.

"Blair, I don't know that I have ever seen you so happy. You are absolutely glowing," she says and grabs my hand.

"Jake has been such a significant part of my healing. This whole process would have been ten times harder without him."

"I can tell he means a lot to you. I am excited to get to know him this weekend. But you don't think things are moving a bit fast?"

"I have questioned that a lot. And he hasn't pushed me any faster than I have wanted to go in our relationship. But it feels so different with him. I never had this happiness and love when I was with John."

"I understand. You know me though; I have to have the mom talk with you."

"Of course, Mama. I am used to your concern. I love and appreciate that so much."



I CLICK OPEN the door to Jake's apartment and instantly smell the amazing aroma of spaghetti and garlic bread. I told him it was the safest meal with the girls, and they would definitely eat it. We walk down the small hall and into

the living room and I stop. My eyes wide and my jaw dropping.

Jake removed the coffee table and extra chair, leaving only the couch. And replacing them, a Barbie Dream House complete with four Barbies, a Barbie car, a small bin of outfits, shoes, and accessories.

My girls scream and drag me by the hands over to the dream house. Once I get down on their level, I notice the house is full. All the furnishings a Barbie Dream House could need are inside. I stand and turn to find Jake; he's watching us as he dries his hands on a towel and smiles. I walk over to him, and grab his hands in mine. "You never stop amazing me."

"I just thought they might need something to play with. I think they love it."

"I think I love you. Even more than I did three hours ago if that's possible."

As I turn to watch my girls play, Jake's arm wraps around my shoulders. I see a glimpse into my future.

Being in a home with my girls. Not worrying if we will make rent, be able to pay our bills on time, or have enough food to last us through the weeks.

Being an adult and mom means sometimes we have to make hard decisions. This decision may have turned my world on its axis, but I wouldn't change a single outcome.

THANK YOU FOR READING!

Please consider leaving a review on Amazon, Goodreads and Bookbub! Your review means the world to me!

**Want to follow me and see what is on the horizon?**

Follow me @AuthorTSpear on Amazon, Goodreads, Bookbub, TikTok, Facebook and Instagram. You can also join my Facebook group T. Spear Squadron.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Favorite Food: Chicken Wings

Favorite Movie: Legally Blonde

Favorite Song: Recovery by James Arthur

Favorite Book: That's not a fair question...

P.S. I love my Jeep!